

Multiliteracies book club: A participatory context  
for Australian public primary school teachers  
to negotiate literacy.

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## DECLARATION

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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content, work that has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

This work was undertaken with approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee, Murdoch University (Approval 2012/004)

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Veronica Gardiner

## ABSTRACT

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This study aimed to explore and influence how Australian public primary school teachers evolve literacy understandings and perspectives, in relation to rapidly changing twenty-first century communication. Acknowledging a variety of theoretical commentary and research literature, the study argues that Australian literacy teaching and learning is currently oriented towards standardised and print-focused approaches, inscribed on teachers' pedagogies through transmissive professional learning and print-oriented curriculum reform. As an alternative, the present research drew on a theoretical framework incorporating multiliteracies theory, community of practice theory and critical perspectives on professional learning, to explore how discourses of multiliteracies can be fostered in a teacher book club involving multimodal texts.

A qualitative case study explored a small group of seven public primary school teachers' voiced perspectives about literacy and professional learning, and how they participated in facilitated multiliteracies knowledge processes, during five monthly book club meetings. To interpret teachers' evolving perspectives and knowledge/s and changing social participation in the book club, critical discourse analysis was applied to chronological transcripts of discursive data. The analysis highlighted how these seven teachers identified constraints on multiliteracies pedagogy in the wider educational context, and engaged in recursive and collaborative negotiation of multiliteracies discourse. In particular, analysis showcased four teachers' emerging orientation to self-sourced digital texts and shifts to peer-led collaborative inquiry. During final reflective discussion, three teachers associated responsive opportunities in the book club with their expanded conception of literacy and interest-driven professional learning. Findings of this study support theorised relationships between multiliteracies and community of practice

processes. Additionally, interpretive discussion elaborates how these teachers shaped book club experiences around peer-relevant needs and interests, by recruiting intercontextual resources. Together, results indicate that the book club format fosters teachers' participatory professional learning for multiliteracies.



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## GLOSSARY OF IMPORTANT TERMS

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**Multiliteracies** (Bull & Anstey, 2010; Cope & Kalantzis, 2013; The New London Group, 1996, 2000): Refers to emerging understandings and practices of literacy, which involve meaning making in a modern digital world. Multiliteracies focus on increasing diversity in complex forms of multimodal texts; and ways that communication can vary across sociocultural contexts.

**Multimodality** (Kress, 2010; The New London Group, 1996, 2000): Refers to how different sign systems or modes layer and interact in complex ways to produce meaning. In multimodal texts, meaning is represented in print, oral, visual, auditory, gestural, tactile and spatial modes.

**Participatory Professional Learning** (Mockler, 2013; Sachs, 2000): Refers to opportunities for teachers to learn collaboratively and address local needs and interests, while negotiating a professional knowledge base.

**Community of Practice** (Wenger, 1998): Refers to how people mutually engage in social learning and practices for shared purposes. Social learning in a community of practice involves interdependent processes of doing, negotiating, inquiring and relating.

## **PREFACE: LINKING PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES TO RESEARCH PURPOSES**

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A brief personal note is included here to link my experiences as a teacher with the warrant of this thesis. During several years as a public primary school teacher, my immersion in classroom practice and school culture has led me to believe that teachers face many common challenges. These challenges were apparent to me while teaching in the remote north of Western Australia, and just as apparent more recently when teaching in an affluent 'leafy green' Australian metropolitan school. Most concerning were tensions between some teachers' goals for rich student-inspired learning and systemic requirements for other versions of literacy teaching. Dilemmas about these tensions would eventually prompt my postgraduate journey.

As the proposal for this study took form, my aim was to work with-and-for primary school teachers, rather than to do something 'to' them. To support this aim, it was necessary to frame the research through a wide satellite view of literacy teaching and learning (Kress, 2010) to critique arrangements as they now stand. While taking this problem-focused vantage, I have not reneged on an abiding appreciation of teachers' commitments to their profession. Reflecting on the need (as a researcher) to critique in order to support, I am reminded of the words of Heinz von Foerster (1991, p. 3), "*Let me begin with the epines – with the thorns – and I hope a rose will emerge.*"

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## CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

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Australian public primary school teachers currently face many challenges. Amongst these is the need to evolve literacy teaching and learning with relevance for twenty-first century communication. In recent decades, communication has undergone rapid technological innovation, with various effects for diverse groups of people. Despite these changes however, traditional constructions of literacy, which foreground practices with print, remain the main frame of reference for teaching and learning in schools (Cope & Kalantzis, 2013; Luke, Woods & Weir, 2013). This is problematic from a contemporary theoretical perspective (Bull & Anstey, 2010; Cope & Kalantzis, 2013; The New London Group, 1996, 2000), which argues that print practices are no longer sufficient for empowering full communicative participation in modern digital environments. This thesis considers these changes and paradoxes, and how teachers might access and develop professional knowledge about them.

This chapter begins by considering the changing nature of literacy and the need for pedagogy to keep pace. The second section asserts that Australian policy and curriculum reforms have provided teachers with limited ways of addressing these issues, and that teachers need support to engage in-depth with new perspectives of literacy. This agenda informs the research questions of this study, which are presented in the third section. The significance of the study is outlined in the fourth section. The fifth section summarises the content of thesis chapters.

### **Evolving Understandings and Practices of Literacy: Challenges in Australia**

With the advent of the internet and the appearance of an array of digital communication devices in our daily lives, meaning is created and accessed in ever more diverse ways around the world. Many literacy theorists recognise the need to develop citizens' literacy

understandings and practices in light of these changes, and with respect to the manifold ways that cultural and commercial communications can be put into play (Bull & Anstey, 2010; Kalantzis & Cope 2012; Kress, 2010). These understandings include the ways digital texts can be created, interpreted and accessed across sociocultural contexts, and manipulated at local and global levels to serve particular sociocultural and sociopolitical interests (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012; Kress, 2010; Luke, 2013; Walsh, 2010). However, to the extent that teaching and learning remains tied to traditional print-based constructions of literacy, today's students may remain unaware of repertoires of practice for navigating digital communication across different contexts.

Aiming to respond to this need, The New London Group (1996, 2000) suggested how traditional constructions of literacy teaching and learning might be reformulated. Through the 'multiliteracies' perspective, literacy was re-theorised as a flexible repertoire of conscious understandings for communicating in a wide range of text types and contexts. Adept manipulation of this repertoire is a means for equitably accessing and producing communicative texts under varying sociocultural conditions.

Following this argument, facilitation of multiliteracies requires re-balancing teachers' and students' traditional participation in literacy. Towards this end, The New London Group (1996, 2000) conceptualised a multidimensional pedagogical framework. However, shifts to pedagogies of multiliteracies have remained limited in Australia (Comber, 2011, 2012; Hipwell & Klenowski, 2011; Lobascher, 2011). In part, constraints can be associated with Australia's policy and curriculum environment.

## Official Policies regarding Literacy and Professional Learning in Australia

In view of communicative changes in the twenty-first century, the influential *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA, 2008)<sup>1</sup> emphasises connections between educational focuses and students' participation in modern life. Setting out Australian educational goals for the next decade, this policy foregrounds confident and critical use of technology and communication as important for democratic participation and citizenship. Seeming to align with these goals, recent federal curriculum reform in Australia has introduced teachers to some new concepts. In particular, the recently mandated *Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum: English* (ACARA, 2012)<sup>2</sup> for the first time requires teachers across Australia to provide learning experiences to do with 'multimodality' and 'multimodal texts'. These concepts are facets of the multiliteracies perspective (Bull & Anstey, 2010; Cope & Kalantzis, 2013; The New London Group, 1996, 2000).

However, while inclusion of these terms in new national curriculum might be considered a mark of development, their meanings have not been easy for teachers to ascertain. Academics argue that detailed explanation of these concepts has remained limited in curriculum documents (Cumming, Kimber & Wyatt-Smith, 2012; Tonkin & Wilkinson, 2010; Walsh, 2010). Consequently, Luke (2013) comments that teachers need to expend intense effort to understand how multiliteracies and multimodality might inform practices in classrooms. These difficulties are added to by other elements of the policy context. For instance, educational reforms in Australia have produced increasingly standardised curriculum and assessment formats, which focus heavily on print-based practices (Hipwell & Klenowski, 2011; Walsh, 2010).

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<sup>1</sup> Referred to in this thesis as the *Melbourne Declaration*

<sup>2</sup> Referred to in this thesis as the *Australian Curriculum: English*

Meanwhile teachers report escalating policy oriented demands (Connell, 2009, 2013), and public debate tends to devalue teachers' professional knowledge in comparison with 'expert' driven policy pronouncements (Mockler, 2013; Snyder, 2008). For example, rather than valuing teachers as professional knowledge workers, public debate often constructs 'low quality' teaching practice as the cause of a crisis in national literacy standards (Snyder, 2008). In consequence, teachers experience significant accountability to prescriptive policy focuses, rather than support for professional knowledge building and innovation (Lingard, 2010; Mockler, 2013).

Empirical research suggests that rather than innovating literacy practice, wider discourses and policy processes have oriented teachers to standardised print versions of literacy (Comber, 2011, 2012; Hipwell & Klenowski, 2011; Lobascher, 2011). Luke, Woods and Weir (2013) argue that these pressures provide rich ground for research into teachers' professional learning about more expansive versions of literacy. In this vein, the current study seeks to explore how teachers' can be supported in active rather than prescriptive professional learning, for the development of contemporary literacy understandings and practices.

### **The Potential of Participatory Professional Learning**

The multiliteracies perspective (Bull & Anstey, 2010; Cope & Kalantzis, 2013; The New London Group, 1996, 2000) positions teachers as knowledge workers, who make decisions about pedagogy based on students' situated interests and learning needs. In other words, teachers are acknowledged as active social learners, who recognise textual and cultural meaning making as diverse, contextual and culturally complex (Fletcher, 2005; Rogers, Mosely & Kramer, 2009). In contrast, available opportunities for teachers' professional learning in Australia often take the form of transmissive 'one size fits all' workshops, which do not focus on localised needs and interests (Doecke & Parr, 2011; Hardy, 2009; Lingard, 2010). Instead, workshops



are predominantly linked to generic print-focused outcomes (Lobascher, 2011; Walsh, 2010). In this context, emerging frames of reference for literacy are often assimilated into existing print-focused discourse (Hipwell & Klenowski, 2011).

If teachers are to evolve literacy with relevance for a digital world, they need embodied experiences with multiliteracies discourse (Bearne, 2009; Kress, 2010; The New London Group, 1996, 2000). This implies social and inquiry-based learning, in spaces supporting knowledge generation and dialogue. The New London Group (1996, 2000) as well as other theorists (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Mockler, 2013), construe this social learning as taking place within communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). This theory has attracted considerable interest in educational research (Barton & Tusting, 2005; Levine, 2010). Wenger proposes that communities of practice emerge from mutual engagement, joint enterprise and opportunities to share meaning about cultural practices, experiences and resources. These conditions enable members to negotiate meanings and purposes, in social relations supporting collaboration and critique.

With the aim of supporting teachers to actively explore and evolve literacy understandings and perspectives, this study drew together the premises of multiliteracies theory (Bull & Anstey, 2010; Cope & Kalantzis, 2013; The New London Group, 1996, 2000) and community of practice theory (Wenger, 1998). To anchor the engagement of a small number of teachers, this study employed the metaphor of a 'book club'. Kooy (2006) found that facilitation of Canadian book clubs for teachers supported critical and reflexive professional learning. She argues that the unveiling of multiple perspectives in social collegiate dialogue aids teachers to question literacy discourse and pedagogy. The present study extended the 'book' focus commonly found in book clubs, by integrating multiliteracies content and multimodal formats such as videos, digital interactives and websites.

## The Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this study was to explore how a small group of seven Western Australian public primary school teachers could be supported in collaborative and critical professional learning in a book club, to co-generate understandings and perspectives about multiliteracies. A multiliteracies book club was designed to contextualise this support within community of practice conditions (Wenger, 1998). The design pertained to a group level case study (Yin, 2012). Interpretation focused on teachers' perceptions and understandings of literacy; how these evolved through professional learning in the book club environment; and how wider societal discourses were implicated. Early analysis and discussion of this case study was subject to preliminary peer review, reflected below in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
*Preliminary peer review*

Timing	Presentation	Focus
After the third book club meeting	Gardiner, V., Cumming-Potvin, W. & Hesterman, S. (2012). Transforming professional learning: Scaffolding primary school teachers in a multiliteracies book club. In <i>Transforming Practice: The Value of Educational Research</i> . Presented at the 27 <sup>th</sup> Annual Research Forum of Western Australian Institute for Educational Research Inc., 11 <sup>th</sup> August 2012, University of Notre Dame, Fremantle, Western Australia.	Ongoing case study design
After the conclusion of five book club meetings	Gardiner, V., Cumming-Potvin, W., & Hesterman, S. (2013). Professional learning in a scaffolded 'multiliteracies book club': Transforming primary teacher participation. <i>Issues in Educational Research</i> , 23(3), 357-374. (See <b>Appendix A</b> )	Emerging themes

These early articulations (above) are extended in the present thesis, by drawing on Gee's (2011) critical discourse analysis. Additionally, this thesis describes empirical relationships between multiliteracies, (Bull & Anstey, 2010; Cope & Kalantzis, 2013; The New London Group, 1996, 2000) community of practice (Wenger, 1998), and intercontextual processes of learning (Arvaja, 2012; Gee & Green, 1998). Throughout the study, data generation and interpretation was framed through the following questions.

### **The Research Questions**

The following broad research question guided inquiry: *How can a small group of Western Australian public primary school teachers, engage with professional learning through a 'multiliteracies book club'?* Under this broad question, four research questions were developed:

1. How do these teachers' perceptions and knowledge of literacy develop through five book club meetings?
2. How do these teachers articulate engagement with multimodality through the book club?
3. What are teachers' perceptions of professional learning about literacy in the current context of public primary school education?
4. How can the book club format contribute to the development of a community of practice?

### **Significance of the Research**

At one level, this study responded to teachers' need to understand terms appearing in the *Australian Curriculum: English*. At a deeper level however, the study recognises teachers as active knowledge workers, who have a professional commitment to pedagogical relevance beyond extrinsic policy purposes. At a theoretical level, the study sought insight into how teachers shape participation in multiliteracies discourse. Findings of this project may prompt teachers, school administrators and pre-service educators to consider how teachers' engagement with

evolving practices of literacy is supported in local and system contexts.

### **The Structure of the Thesis**

The first chapter has introduced the background and main rationale for this study. The second chapter reviews historical constructions of literacy, contemporary perspectives on literacy and the context of Australian curriculum and policy reform. During review, multiliteracies (Bull & Anstey, 2010; Cope & Kalantzis, 2013; The New London Group, 1996, 2000), and community of practice (Wenger, 1998) theories will be presented. With the aim of interrogating the current state of teachers' participation in professional knowledge, the Australian curriculum landscape (Green, 2008; Lingard, 2010) and formats for teachers' professional learning in Australia (Mockler, 2013) are critiqued. The multiliteracies book club is proposed as an exploratory alternative. Research methodology and methods are described in the third chapter including: the researcher's inquiry position, the design of the multiliteracies book club case study, sampling and recruitment strategies, and methods of data generation and analysis. Selected critical discourse analysis of discursive data (Gee, 2011) is represented in the fourth chapter. Major themes in the findings are presented and discussed in the fifth chapter, in light of wider empirical research and debate. Later in the fifth chapter, empirical patterns in multiliteracies, community of practice and intercontextual processes of learning are elaborated. These patterns are interpreted as affirming premises of the theoretical framework, and as reflecting teachers' active shaping of professional learning opportunities in the book club. Implications and limitations of the present study are considered, with recommendations for further research. The conclusion argues that the multiliteracies book club enlarges possibilities for teachers' democratic, participatory and conceptual professional learning for multiliteracies.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

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The second chapter describes Australian literacy teaching and learning and future directions for teachers' professional learning. It begins by reviewing historical shifts in the construction of literacy over recent decades in Australia. While different perspectives feature in the contemporary context, it will be argued that traditional print-based perspectives remain a strong presence. Moving beyond traditional formulations, the second section presents multiliteracies theory (Bull & Anstey, 2010; Cope & Kalantzis, 2013; The New London Group, 1996, 2000). This perspective attends to increasing textual and sociocultural diversity in twenty-first century communication. Its aim is to empower citizens with socially flexible practices for technologically enhanced meaning making and communicative participation. In the third section, the possibility of evolving this approach is considered with respect to Australia's current policy environment. Important constraining elements of this environment include the instigation of standardised national curriculum and an increasing tendency towards competitive assessment protocols premised on traditional constructions of literacy.

Shifting approaches to teachers' professional learning are reviewed in the fourth section. Transmissive professional learning is problematised in regard to active knowledge building processes (Doecke & Par, 2011). As an alternative, it will be argued that professional learning should be fully participatory (Mockler, 2013), so that teachers can collaboratively negotiate diverse ways of constructing literacy in response to students' sociocultural needs and interests. This form of professional learning aligns with the way teachers are positioned in the multiliteracies perspective (The New London Group, 1996, 2000). In the fifth section, participatory professional learning is conceptualised through Wenger's (1998) community of practice theory. Communities of practice coalesce in social learning contexts where shared purposes, collaborative participation and joint inquiry are

hallmarks. To focus the design of this study, limitations of community of practice theory are outlined and addressed. A book club metaphor is used to inform how teachers can interact in a text-focused community of practice setting. Theoretical perspectives are melded together to focus inquiry on how a small group of seven teachers could evolve their perspectives, understandings and practices of multiliteracies within a book club setting. The following section begins to contextualise this inquiry in a landscape of shifting historical constructions of literacy.

### **Historical Shifts in the Construction of Literacy Teaching and Learning in Australia**

This section examines Australian literacy teaching and learning through a sociohistorical lens. It showcases how constructions of literacy change in response to cultural, sociopolitical and theoretical conditions (Bull & Anstey, 2005; Kress, 2010). This characterisation is important, because in the last few decades, Australian literacy has appealed to contradictory paradigms, which have championed different priorities with various consequences for sociocultural groupings (Gee, 1990; Janks, 2010; Kress, 2010). The historical evolution of literacy is recounted below.

In the middle of the twentieth-century, literacy was widely viewed as the mastery of fixed procedures with alphabetical print, syntax and grammar (Bull & Anstey, 2005; Kress, 2010). In Australia, where many cultural practices followed those of the English empire, didactic and hierarchical schooling practices were customary (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012). Consequently, traditional schooling institutionalised inequity, by stratifying access to cultural knowledge (Janks, 2010). For example, children of the elite ruling classes were often immersed in culturally enshrined knowledge, while children born into laboring, trade and service families were offered access to limited reading and writing skills.

In the second half of the twentieth-century, Australians accessed a proliferating range of cultural and material goods, due to global mass production and industrial capitalism (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012). One effect was the increasing availability of a variety of print texts (Bull & Anstey, 2005), including a new array of literature for children (Saxby, 1999). Concurrently, interdisciplinary conceptualisations of learning began to change. For instance paradigmatic emphases shifted from behaviorism (see Skinner, 1963, 1985; Thorndike, 1969), to social learning (see Bandura, 1969; Bowlby, 1953) and to cognitivism (see Chomsky, 1966). These paradigms shaped pedagogies around different affective, cognitive and motivational aspects of learning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Kalantzis & Cope, 2012).

Schooling practices drew on learning paradigms in various ways over the following decades. Broadly but not exclusively, schooling integrated: direct instruction, information processing approaches, the use of cueing, reader-response protocols, and developmental learning (Winch, Johnston, March, Ljungdahl & Holliday, 2010). Pedagogies were subject to contestation due to differences in paradigmatic orientation. For instance, information processing approaches highlighted individual differences in cognitive manipulation (during encoding, repetition, and retrieval of textual information), treating learning as a problem of response efficiency rather than personal meaning making. In contradistinction, Rosenblatt's (1978, 1993) reader-response approach emphasised personal meaning making and textual interpretation. Drawing on the interactionist perspective of Dewey and Bentley (1949), Rosenblatt viewed meaning making as inseparable from the reader's biographical, cultural and socioemotional embodiment. From this view, learners demonstrate sophistication as they develop awareness of relationships between experience and meaning making. Knowledge about these relationships is viewed as qualitative, rather than a matter of efficiency as in information processing approaches.

Increased recognition of the relationship between culture and learning became visible in the work of two literacy theorists. Heath's (1989) ethnographic work in Southern Carolina detailed how schooling can privilege the language and cultural practices of 'white' middle class students. In complement, Goodman (1989) elaborated how children tend to learn holistically, as they integrate personally meaningful knowledge into school-based meaning making. Goodman's theorising lead to the whole language approach, which values students' active meaning making in textually rich, equitable and communicative learning environments. Together, Heath (1989) and Goodman (1989) premised an important connection between human meaning making and variable sociocultural, institutional and ideological conditions for learning.

In the 1980s and 1990s, sociocultural and sociopolitical factors in learning became a distinct focus when Gee (1990, 1999) and Street (1997) generated the new literacy studies. Like Heath (1989) and Goodman (1989), new literacy studies viewed literacy learning as responsive to sociocultural experience, although it also went further (Barton & Hamilton, 2005; Street & Rogers, 2012). Street's (1997) work for example, explicitly rejected the notion that literacy can be encapsulated by universal and context-neutral practices. Moreover, he critiqued the equity of Anglocentric constructions of curricula, arguing that real life variability and complexity are inherent aspects of social life, and that literacy is a flexible social practice. Following from these arguments, Street asserted that schooling empowers learning only in so far as it complements students' diverse participation in the lifeworld. Alternately, in so far as schooling overwrites diverse sociocultural knowledge/s, students from nondominant cultures are socially disempowered and marginalised.

Also under the banner of new literacy studies, Gee (1990, 1999) located practices of literacy in the discursive production of social purposes and relationships. His central argument was that variable



practices of communication are socially functional: Communication is something we 'do' with socially shared meanings for socially understood purposes, in particular ways in different places. Broadly, this is to understand literacy as socially negotiated, where meanings are 'settled' through power struggles between differently positioned social groups (Gee, 1990; Street & Rogers, 2012). Theorists of this perspective take a special interest in the ways that people and groups use recognisable patterns of communication and knowledge to produce material arrangements, sociocultural status, and identity. Gee (1990) refers to these patterns as Discourses (with a capital D):

*A Discourse is a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or ... to signal a socially meaningful role.*

(p. 143)

Struggles and settlements about the meaning of literacy have featured in cycles of Australian public debate. Snyder (2008) notes that this phenomenon is known colloquially as the literacy wars, epitomising how traditional and whole language approaches have been pitted against each other in the mass media. During these skirmishes, traditionalists emphasise skill-based learning and incremental phonics, decoding and print recognition strategies. From this view, teachers implement sequenced curriculum and measure students' replication of generic skills and knowledge/s. At the other pole, sociocultural and sociocritical theorists (for example new literacy and discourse theorists), reclaim literacy as a variable and sociopolitically produced activity (Gee, 2011; Kress, 2010). In this way, the notion that literacy is a-cultural, and that schooling should adhere to fixed and socially stratifying formulations of literacy, continues to receive critique (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012; Luke, 2004a).

While perennial debate continues, Luke (2013) believes these antagonisms tend to oversimplify the complexity of literacy education. This oversimplification limits our recognition of ongoing sociocultural

evolutions of literacy and changing policy conditions. To open up debate about these complexities, Luke proposes that literacy should rather be seen as a contemporary form of diversity. This view acknowledges the continuing importance of existing print practices, as well as more malleable and diverse repertoires of practice for sociocultural relevance and equity (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012; Kress, 2010).

A balanced approach is represented in the four resources model of Luke and Freebody (1999). Exemplifying a social practice perspective, this model frames four interdependent ways of 'doing things' with communication. The four resources include practices with linguistic structures, text genre and personal life-world connections, thus spanning formal and informal dimensions of experience. The code-breaker, text-user and text-participant roles scaffold practices with semiotics, text conventions and affective comprehension. The text-analyst role provokes sociopolitical awareness, for instance by interrogating stereotypes or point of view. These four interdependent practices assist learners with plural ways of knowing and expressing, to fit the demands of different sociocultural situations (Luke & Freebody, 1999). The four resources model has been influential in Australian (see Hill, 2010) and overseas educational contexts (see Serafini, 2012).

So far, this review has examined historical shifts in the conceptualisation of literacy and highlighted how these conceptualisations continue to be subject to contestation. Drawing on sociocultural and sociocritical perspectives, an integrative and balanced view of literacy has been suggested for responding to contemporary diversity. In line with the purposes of this study, the next section views these notions through the future-oriented frame of multiliteracies theory.

## **Multiliteracies Theory**

The twenty-first century has become an arena for many societal changes, including the proliferation of digital text formats and new communicative environments. To theorise how literacy and pedagogy might encompass new forms of meaning making, a group of literacy theorists innovated sociocultural, sociocritical and new literacy studies frameworks (Street, 2005). This innovation resulted in the generation of multiliteracies theory (The New London Group, 1996, 2000), which focuses on textual and sociocultural diversity in the twenty-first century, and the need for reformulated literacy practice and pedagogy. The next subsection characterises this theory.

### **What might twenty-first century literacy mean?**

In the early 1990s, a group of ten theorists (Cazden, Cope, Fairclough & Gee et al, 1996) later known as The New London Group (2000), met in New Hampshire to theorise literacy practices in view of digitally enhanced communication. Group discussion drew on sociocultural, sociocritical and new literacy studies, and collective expertise in linguistics, discourse studies, multicultural education, media-studies, social semiotics and critical literacy. The theorists agreed that literacy needed to be re-conceptualised in two pivotal ways: with relevance to proliferating digital text types and sign systems; and for conscious ways of understanding sociocultural diversity and equitable communicative participation across local/global and private/public spheres. To reference this expanded notion of literacy, the term 'multiliteracies' was created. Multiliteracies defined literacy as a flexible repertoire of conscious understandings, for communicating in a wide range of text types and for enabling critically conscious textual production and access. Bull and Anstey (2010), describe a multiliterate person in the following way:

*A multiliterate person must be literate in traditional and new communication technologies and the semiotic systems utilized in them . . . . In a world of social mobility and cultural diversity, a multiliterate person must be able to recognise the appropriate literacy practices necessary in a particular context. They must then draw upon their repertoire of knowledge, skills and practices, and utilize them in a way that will achieve the desired outcome.*

(p. 7)

The capabilities that Bull and Anstey describe hinge on flexible textual and ideological practices, which include but also expand beyond procedures with print text.

In relation to textual practices, multiliteracies theory utilises the construct of multimodality, drawing on the fields of semiotics and linguistics. Multimodality refers to how meaning is carried and interpreted through interacting sign systems (Kress, 2010). While The New London Group (1996, 2000) originally described five interacting sign systems or modes of communication, more recently these have been expanded into the following seven (see Cope & Kalantzis, 2013; Kress 2010):

- the print mode (written alphabetical and numerical signs),
- the oral mode (human and machine spoken language),
- the visual mode (still and moving images),
- the auditory mode (sound),
- the gestural mode (expressive and kinesthetic movement of living beings and characters),
- the tactile mode (bodily perceptions like smell, touch or taste),  
and
- the spatial mode (layout of communication in time and space).

From the multiliteracies perspective, all communication is seen as design combinations of these modes. The concept of design relates to active and dynamic processes, where people use available understandings of signs, knowledge, strategies and skills to access, interpret and re/make meaning (Kress, 2010; The New London Group,

1996, 2000). In the everyday realm of social communication this means people:

- encounter meanings made by others (the designed),
- use available repertoires to make or remake meaning (through designing), and
- either reproduce or transform meaning (the redesigned).

To design and redesign with purpose, people need knowledge of sociocultural and sociopolitical agendas, as well as flexible modal and textual practices. Equitable learning for literacy enables flexible repertoires for designing and redesigning meaning, which can be used to respond to the demands of variable sociocultural situations (Kress, 2010).

A capacity to respond to different types of texts and formats is particularly important, in view of the array of multimodal forms created, used and interpreted across public and private spaces of the post-industrialised world (Bull & Anstey, 2010; Walsh, 2010). For instance, multimodal digital texts are evident in multilayered and hyperlinked web pages, digital games, social media and television programs. Callow (2013) and Kress (2010) argue that visual texts have become primordial for communicating in everyday Australian life. Further, many young people engage intensely and frequently with a variety of multimodal texts in their out-of-school lives (Sanford & Madill, 2007). It follows that a literate twenty-first century person (of any age), requires a repertoire of practices for designing and redesigning multimodal texts. In order to support this flexibility, The New London Group (1996, 2000) proposed a pedagogical framework to guide evolutions of teaching and learning.

### **A pedagogy of multiliteracies**

The New London Group (1996, 2000) offered a pedagogy of multiliteracies to suggest how learners could develop conscious literacy practices for a modern world. In this pedagogy, learning takes place through increasingly sophisticated practices of interpretation and

re/design, during immersion in diverse text forms and explicit metalanguage. Learning opportunities are facilitated through informal and formal textual focuses, but in particular enmesh with learners' diverse sociocultural knowledge/s and experiences. The New London Group (1996, 2000) outlined four related dimensions for conceptualising and balancing this knowledge work:

- Situated practice draws out learners' reflections on their experiences, interests, identities and existing knowledge base.
- Overt instruction engages learners with explicit metalanguage for sharing meanings about purposeful design of texts.
- Critical framing enables learners to problematise practices of meaning making and design in the context of their use.
- Transformed practice emerges when learners create and redesign texts and practices.

In any particular setting, one dimension of knowledge work may naturally come to the fore (Mills, 2006). However across a range of experiences, learners engage dynamically and recursively across dimensions (The New London Group, 2000, p. 32). This is because each dimension potentiates the knowledge work of other dimensions. Situated practice unveils learners' different backgrounds and experiences, creating inter-play between experiential and analytic practices. Overt instruction builds opportunities for shared metalanguage and the co-construction of conceptual schemas. Critical framing supports learners to consider affordances and constraints in existing understandings, practices and environments. Together, these three dimensions enable learners to evolve purposes, inquiries and actions during transformed practice, where encountered texts and meanings are redesigned and re-contextualised.

The facilitation of connections between these dimensions of knowledge work is sometimes referred to as 'weaving' (Cazden, 2006; Kwek, Albright, & Kramer-Dahl, 2007). This metaphor captures how learners and teachers nurture interchanges between cognitive,

experiential and sociocultural realms of meaning making. While informed educators seek to gradually balance meaning making opportunities, and encourage learners to access a broadening range of texts and concepts, they ipso facto expand teaching and learning beyond traditional print-focused practices (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012; The New London Group, 1996, 2000).

At the text level, teachers of multiliteracies draw on a repertoire of pedagogical moves to facilitate learners' grasp of multimodal design configurations (Kress, 2010). This facilitation fosters recognition of the variable ways that communication can take place in each mode, and how they combine across modes (Jewitt, 2008; Kress, 2010). Previously, this review has alluded to how multimodal texts embed different kinds of print, and layer images and audio. Understanding multimodal design is therefore complex, as layers can be read, combined and understood in diverse ways by different people, depending on their experiences and meaning making repertoires. Further, available textual meanings (the designed) can be implicit, explicit, complementary or contradictory. Multiliteracies pedagogy gradually fosters deconstructive and interpretive skills for unpacking these complexities (Jewitt, 2008; Kress, 2010).

As indicated, a ready repertoire of sophisticated meaning making practices helps students respond flexibly to different situations in their lived environments (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012; Kress 2010; The New London Group, 1996, 2000). Social and purposeful talk is key to enabling this flexibility (The New London Group, 1996, 2000), because purposeful talk makes designs transparent and explicit. Through talk, learners also expand sociocultural knowledge/s and ideological awareness. Egalitarian discursive relations are implied.

Aiming to support the development of pedagogy for multiliteracies, theorists encourage teachers to consider practices and knowledge in light of real world relevance (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012). This ongoing professional learning must be premised on a willingness to contest

fixed views of literacy and to respond to an ever-changing lifeworld. From a social learning perspective, ongoing processes of recognition, reflection and change are supported when teachers collaboratively negotiate multiple perspectives and make connections across realms of experience (Fletcher, 2005; The New London Group, 1996, 2000; Rogers, Mosely & Kramer, 2009). Such discussions potentially empower teachers to co-develop metalanguage and practices, as they situate and justify emergent pedagogies (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012).

The multiliteracies perspective is present in the theorising of many contemporary researchers, who agree that exclusively print-centric constructions of literacy are socially inequitable and unrepresentative of modern communication (Cope & Kalantzis, 2013; Hipwell & Klenowski, 2011; Kress, 2010; Walsh, 2010). However, academic commentators Cope and Kalantzis (2013) and Luke, Woods and Weir (2013) note that while twenty-first century communication has become a significant theme in Australian debate and policy making, print-based pedagogies appear to remain primordial in schools.

Along with others (Bearne, 2009; Kress, 2010), this study argues that if teachers are to co-develop pedagogy for multiliteracies, they need situated, overt and critical opportunities to participate in multiliteracies discourse. The possibility of such participation has been hinted at in recent inclusion of the term multimodality in new national curriculum. However this study argues that in isolation, curriculum documents only support teachers' understandings of this term in limited ways. To present this argument, the next section examines contemporary Australian policy making. It asserts that while rationales of the new national curriculum acknowledge broader conceptions of literacy, traditional constructions remain the default position in more detailed descriptions within the document. Such discrepancies illustrate how different constructions of literacy can be acknowledged, mediated and settled in official curriculum texts, with the effect of privileging established notions of literacy (Green, 2008; Luke, 2010, 2013).



## **The Australian Policy Context and the Curriculum Reform of Literacy**

Practices of teaching and learning are influenced by multiple factors (Luke, 2013). One important influence is the way knowledge is constructed in policy and curriculum documents. The term 'constructed' is used specifically here. According to Luke (2013), official curricula such as Australia's new national curriculum are selective representations of the way knowledge is to be taught and learnt. From this view, curricula are contestable, because they enliven and also mask particular sociocultural and sociopolitical agendas, which bring material, ideological and social consequences into being. The next section employs a critical perspective to examine current educational reform, analysing how the *Australian Curriculum: English* foregrounds traditional constructions of literacy.

### **Recent educational policy reform in Australia**

In Australia, policy making about teaching and learning has long been debated (Green, 2008). In recent years debate has turned to the advent of Australia's first national curriculum (Ditchburn, 2012; Lingard, 2010; Luke, Woods, & Weir 2013). Standardisation of national curriculum has followed federal creation of the *Melbourne Declaration* (MCEETYA, 2008), which sets out broad national goals for Australian schools over the next decade. Although the *Melbourne Declaration* does not provide an overarching definition of literacy, its aim is to associate quality schooling for all Australians students with flexible and socially responsive literacy and numeracy learning. The notion of creative and informed future citizens is strongly embedded, and the document explicitly promotes students' enhanced use of digital technologies.

Phased implementation of the national curriculum has been contiguous with a raft of assessment reforms, politically framed as strategies for nation building and economic prosperity (Comber, 2012; Tusting, 2012). Policy makers reason that system-wide standardisation of learning and assessment is essential because: Australia needs to

improve its national performance on the *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's* (OECD) *Program for International Student Assessment* (PISA); and accountability to standardised curriculum is seen as a tool for this improvement (Hardy, 2010; Lingard, 2010; Luke, 2013). PISA is an international measure for ranking the literacy and numeracy performance of fifteen year olds across participating nations (Lingard, 2010).

Australia's competitive performance on the PISA scale is perceived as securing international political and economic success (Hardy, 2009, 2010; Luke, 2013). With a view to bolstering this success, the *Australian Education Act* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2013) has goal-set for Australia to be ranked in the top 25 nations on PISA by 2025. The Australian Government has also instituted the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) (ACARA, 2011) (Luke, 2010; Lobascher, 2011), to compare and monitor students' academic performance at local and state levels across grades three, five, seven and nine.

However, despite heavy political promotion, the necessity of these measures is not unilaterally accepted by sociocritical academics. On one hand, nation-building discourses are ubiquitous in post-industrialised countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States, which share resources, commodities and labor markets (Alexander, 2011; Au, 2011; Ditchburn, 2012; Lingard, 2010; Luke, 2010). On the other hand, many theorists argue that policy associations between improved student learning and standardised curriculum and assessment are overdrawn (Cumming, Kimber & Wyatt-Smith, 2011; Ditchburn, 2012; Hardy, 2009).

It can be instructive to consider these associations from the following angle: If it is true that standardised curriculum and assessment create conditions for improved literacy learning, what types of literacy improvements are produced? Several Australian studies have taken this as a focus for inquiry. However the findings of these studies point to

concerning trends. One finding is that pedagogy increasingly features traditional rather than evolving conceptualisations of literacy and learning (Cumming, Kimber & Wyatt-Smith, 2011; Klenowski, 2009). Other findings suggest that while increased classroom time is spent on teaching literacy, this time is disproportionately invested in the drilling of print oriented strategies (Comber, 2011; Lobascher, 2011). Some researchers argue that this narrowing is a consequence of teachers' compliance with dominant curriculum discourses (Kress, 2006; Luke, 2010, 2013). Some also believe that teachers experience significant dilemmas regarding these policy prescriptions (Comber, 2012; Connell, 2013; Luke, 2013; Tusting, 2012).

In parallel with policy-making, recent alarmist debate in the mass media has framed curriculum standardisation as a remedy for a supposed literacy crisis. Snyder (2008) asserts that such crises are often fabricated to amplify the perception that teachers should narrow their practices in line with strategic political agendas. Common parlance labels this narrowed construction of pedagogy as a 'back to basics' approach (Klenowski, 2009; Luke, 2010; Snyder, 2009). Notable instances of this discourse appeared when Australia's latest PISA results were published in the popular media<sup>3</sup>.

Gee (1990) believes that back to basics discourse seeks to revalidate traditional purposes for education. In this context, teachers often find themselves navigating competing narratives: the need for contextually responsive teaching, as opposed to the production of print-based outcomes evinced in prescriptive curricula (Luke 2004b; Murphy, 2011). Snyder (2009) comments on teachers' dilemmas about these competing narratives:

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<sup>3</sup> See Australian media articles

<http://theconversation.com/why-we-should-never-return-to-the-three-rs-13179>;  
<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-12-11/aussie-schools-flatline-in-international-education-tests/4422532>

*literacy [is seen] as encoding and decoding, grammar, basic language skills and the study of the canon. The dominant view reflects nostalgia for transmission approaches to teaching – for basics, for control and for order. The conservative critics want to preserve valued traditions, while literacy teachers are caught somewhere between the legacy of the past and the imperative to prepare children for the demands of the future.*  
(p. 19)

Ideally, one might imagine that teachers of English are empowered to expand students' literacy repertoires with relevance for future meaning making (Kress, 2006). From a multiliteracies perspective (Bull & Anstey, 2010; Cope & Kalantzis, 2013; The New London Group, 1996, 2000), democratic participation in meaning making pivots on students' and teachers' access-to and engagement-with diverse social and textual repertoires of practice.

A tour through the new curriculum illuminates how different purposes for literacy are currently promoted and settled (Green, 2010). Luke (2013) argues that sociocultural and sociopolitical agendas are always evident in the content and structures of curriculum documents. Luke, Woods, and Weir (2013) explain how curricula influence teachers' constructions of literacy:

*It [curriculum] has the effect of enabling and disabling particular kinds of teacher professional interpretation and face-to-face interaction in schools and classrooms . . . it encourages and discourages teacher and student autonomous action, critical analyses of local contexts, and teachers' bending and shaping of curriculum to respond to particular students' needs and to particular school and community contingencies.*  
(p. 7)

The next section briefly explores the *Australian Curriculum: English*, arguing that while contemporary perspectives on literacy are acknowledged, the curriculum nonetheless adheres to a traditional construction of literacy teaching and learning.

### **The Australian literacy curriculum**

The *Australian Curriculum: English* is an online ensemble of hierarchical rationales and descriptors. The English learning area is broadly organised into three linked strands: language, literature and literacy. Sawyer (2010) notes that this stranding reflects traditionally

segmented curriculum focuses. The following explorations illustrate how despite dissimulations to the contrary in overarching rationales, this pattern of segmentation is repeated in finer-level curriculum descriptors.

Each strand of the English learning area is comprised of an overarching rationale and clustered grade level descriptors. The language strand focuses on the patterns and purpose of language. The literature strand supports students' appreciation and production of literary works with attention to aesthetics and culture. The literacy strand emphasises twenty-first century imperatives:

*Students learn to adapt language to meet the demands of more general or more specialized purposes, audiences and contexts. They learn about the different ways in which knowledge and opinion are represented and developed in texts, and about how more or less abstraction and complexity can be shown through language and through multimodal representations.*

(ACARA, 2012)<sup>4</sup>

However, while rationales promote integration of contemporary and traditional practices, some theorists argue that this integrative perspective is less apparent in subsidiary sections of the curriculum (Tonkin & Wilkinson, 2010). That is, learning descriptors are presented in lists, which potentially quarantine newly included practices from traditional practices. Arguably, this segmentation provides teachers with few ways of cohering understandings and practices of literacy (Luke, 2013; Sawyer, 2010; Tonkin & Wilkinson, 2010).

The following worked example demonstrates how segmentation might affect teacher decision making in relation to multimodality. Perusal of the 'literacy' strand reveals that primary teachers are to provide opportunities for grade three students to create multimodal elements of text. However descriptors in the 'literature' strand for this grade level highlight practices with print book texts. This is just one of several examples in the primary grade level descriptors which

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<sup>4</sup> Literacy: *Expanding the repertoire of English Usage*, Para 1  
<http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/english/literacy>

foreground the print mode rather than other modalities. In such circumstances, teachers' practices are focused through traditional frames.

A different aspect of the curriculum adds to problems of segmentation discussed above. That is, when the term multimodality is used in the curriculum, it is usually accompanied by only simple explanations (Cloonan, 2011; Tonkin & Wilkinson, 2010; Walsh, 2010). For instance, the following explanation is offered in the overarching learning area rationale:

*Texts . . . can be written, spoken or multimodal, and in print or digital/online forms. Multimodal texts combine language with other means of communication such as visual images, soundtrack or spoken word, as in film or computer presentation media.*

(ACARA, 2012)<sup>5</sup>

While this explanation provides teachers with a foundation for understanding multimodality, the two following worked examples demonstrate that more detailed information about multimodality is unavailable. A first example explores content descriptors for grades two and three, listed under the 'Creating Texts' (ACELY1671; ACELY 1682) category. These descriptors propose that learning opportunities should be facilitated around multimodal elements of text, but no information is provided about what this means. In a second example taken from grade two content descriptors under the 'Interpreting, analysing and Evaluating' category, a hyperlink is provided to an explanatory pop-up page. In this window multimodality is described as synonymous with multiliteracies or multiple literacies. Besides the cumulative problem of now trying to understand three new terms, no other information is provided to assist with understanding what any of these terms mean. Two online searches of the whole curriculum site (Accessed June 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>, 2014) resulted in consistent redirection to this particular window. These informal inquiries suggest that rather than supporting teachers' understandings about multimodality, a search for further information in the curriculum can prove somewhat

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<sup>5</sup> Content structure, Para. 3 <http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/english/content-structure>

fruitless.

In summary, a close reading of the *Australian Curriculum: English* does not support teachers to enrich or question literacy practices in light of multimodal designs of meaning or diverse understandings about text. At worst, teachers might find contradictions and lack of information in the curriculum vexing. Consequently, the curriculum provides an unlikely pathway towards multiliteracies pedagogy. To consider other ways this development might be achieved, the next section outlines current provisions for professional learning in this policy context.

### **The Construction of Teachers' Professional Learning**

Professional learning potentially provides teachers with a pathway towards multiliteracies pedagogy. The multiliteracies perspective (Bull & Anstey, 2010; Cope & Kalantzis, 2013; The New London Group, 1996, 2000) specifically positions teachers as knowledge workers, who facilitate and co-design pedagogy and classroom inquiry based on students' situated interests and learning needs. In other words, teachers are active social learners, who critically frame evolving pedagogies in response to situated textual and cultural meaning making practices (Fletcher, 2005; Rogers, Mosely & Kramer, 2009; The New London Group, 1996, 2000). This section illustrates how in contradiction, current versions of professional learning constrain Australian teachers' participation in active learning, and coerce compliance with narrow policy purposes (Doecke & Parr, 2011; Tuinamuana, 2011). The following subsection presents a historical portrait of Australian teachers' professional learning, highlighting a recent return to transmissive formats.

#### **Shifts between transmissive and participatory professional learning in Australia**

Various theorists have offered historical accounts of teachers' professional learning in Australia (see Loughran, 2012; Mockler, 2013;

Sachs, 2000). According to these authors, Australian teachers of the middle twentieth-century employed fixed teaching strategies and content knowledge, purveyed to them through lecture-style instruction. However by the 1970s, there was growing recognition of teachers' dissatisfaction with these transmissive methods. By the 1980s a more scholarly interest was taken in effective and equitable formats for professional learning.

Consequently, in the 1990s, professional learning inclined towards ongoing, social and situated activities, where teachers could equitably co-construct and critique pedagogy (Loughran 2012; Mockler, 2013). This professional learning was conceptualised as participatory, defined as an active process of meaning making, where teachers collectively generate and justify their own diverse knowledge base (Loughran, 2012; Mockler, 2013; Sachs, 2000). Aligning with sociocultural and critical perspectives, participatory professional learning also positions teachers' collective experiences and individual beliefs as important influences on decision-making about practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Opfer & Pedder, 2011).

By the end of the twentieth-century, these shifts towards participatory professional learning coincided with a wider focus on democratic decision-making and public good. At this time, new literacy studies theorists Gee (1990) and Street (1997) were deconstructing sociopolitical influences on literacy, and social equity was a core concern in policy making (Connell, 2013; Sachs, 2000). Unfortunately however, this participatory climate was not to last.

Reflecting a reverse of these developments, Doecke and Parr's (2011) recent survey across Australia indicates that teachers' professional learning is currently put into play through large-scale workshops, informed mainly by top-down policy purposes. This regression to transmissive methods has been associated with increasingly standardised constructions of teacher professionalism in Australia, shadowing broader uptake of standardised learning across



educational spheres (Mockler, 2013).

### **The standardisation of teachers' professional learning**

A growing number of Australian researchers maintain that teachers' professional learning has become subject to standardisation. In particular, theorists claim that content reflects an increasingly narrow knowledge base (Connell, 2013; Hardy & Melville, 2013; Kostagriz & Doecke, 2013; Mockler, 2013). This narrowing has emerged in subtle ways. Mockler (2013) and Kostagriz and Melville (2013) comment that when standards for professional practice (such as AITSL) are constructed and regulated by central government bodies, teachers are coerced into production of a restricted imaginary of quality teaching. In this context, pedagogical deviations incur public and bureaucratic scrutiny, marginalising diverse and evolving approaches (Luke, Woods & Weir, 2013).

In relation to this narrowing, Honan, Exley, Kervin, Simpson and Wells (2013) assert that some Australian professional teaching standards emphasise alphabetical and phonics elements of literacy pedagogy. To the extent that print literacy is more evident in pedagogical guidelines, teachers' knowledge of multiliteracies, multimodality and social diversity is made secondary. In taking a multiliteracies perspective, the present study advocates instead for more diverse and critical professional learning. Australian academic commentator Raewyn Connell (2013) maintains that this expansiveness is key if teachers, students and communities are to keep pace with rapidly changing futures.

A recent body of research has aimed to support teachers' participatory professional learning, and provide a counter-narrative to narrow transmissive approaches (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Loughran, 2012; Mockler, 2013; Opfer & Pedder, 2011). Broadly, this research theorises participatory professional learning as dynamic, non-linear and collaborative. Features typically include opportunities to:

- engage in sustained discursive appreciation and critique of pedagogy;
- relate existing knowledge to new understandings; and
- develop a climate of trust, collaboration and risk taking (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Loughran, 2012).

Such an approach enables teachers to deconstruct historical and biographical experiences and their impact on constructions of literacy pedagogy (Strong-Wilson, 2008).

The previous section identified a pressing need for primary school teachers to problematise contradictory and reductive meanings in policy texts such as the *Australian Curriculum: English*. As a starting point this implies: reframing print-based literacy approaches (Hipwell & Klenowski, 2011; Lobascher, 2011); and re-validating practices for social diversity, equity and social justice (Kostagriz & Doecke, 2013; Luke, Woods & Weir, 2013). In the current study, these practices are viewed as pivotal for participatory professional learning about multiliteracies.

### **Participatory professional learning and multiliteracies**

To stimulate wider participation in multiliteracies, some teachers and researchers have begun to co-construct classroom practices in light of multiliteracies theory. So far, relationships between classroom pedagogy and student meaning making have been a major focus. Recent examples include Hesterman (2011), Hill (2010), Walsh (2011) and Cloonan (2008) in Australia, and Giampapa (2010) in Canada. Hesterman's (2011) case study described how eleven boys in early childhood education demonstrated enriched expression and creativity during engagement with multiliteracies practices and multimodal text. Hill (2010) collaborated with twenty-five teacher-researchers to develop continuity between young children's home and school literacies. This positioned children as active social learners, supported by teachers' increasingly situated and explicit practices with digital

literacies. Walsh (2011), in collaboration with the Australian Catholic University and the Catholic Education Office Sydney, developed strategies and principles for bringing multiliteracies practices to life in classrooms. In doing so, she developed ways for teachers to frame and reflect on situated practices. Cloonan (2009) instigated a participatory action research 'intervention' (p. 16), as part of a larger project through the Victorian Department of Education in Australia. In this project, teacher-researchers became designers of multiliteracies pedagogy, supported by external research mentors. While several classroom-based films of pedagogical transformations were produced, teachers' perspectives about knowledge building and policy issues were not revealed.

Taking a different angle, some studies have concentrated on how pre-service teachers construct knowledge and practices for multimodal learning. For example Oakley, Howitt, Garwood and Durack (2013) investigated how pre-service teachers develop multimodal practices to support young children with autism. These authors conclude that conceptually informed pedagogy with digital technology empowers diverse students to develop broadened communicative repertoires.

Other researchers have consulted experienced Australian teachers to develop conceptual frameworks for multiliteracies practice in classrooms. For instance, Callow (2013) integrated teachers' feedback into a book about visual literacy. The 'Learning by Design' project of Kalantzis and Cope (2011) continues to be influential in promoting design formats for multiliteracies pedagogy. Cloonan (2011) describes how teachers and researchers can collaborate to develop accessible multimodal metalanguage. Exley and Mills (2012) have published examples of multimodal text analysis, to inform teachers' interpretation of the *Australian Curriculum: English*, and support multiliteracies planning. Across these studies however, teachers' literacy perspectives and dilemmas about professional learning have not been reported as major focuses.

Some recommendations have been offered for prospective projects. Bull and Anstey (2010) suggest that teachers' professional learning should be sustained and collaborative, where situated literacy and pedagogy are central to discussion. Cloonan (2011) has cautioned that teachers can be uneasy with new terminology, as they sometimes perceive multiliteracies theorising as abstract and inaccessible. The present study considered these recommendations highly relevant to fostering teachers' participation in reflective, critical, and socially discursive learning opportunities. In the next section, these goals are related to Wenger's (1998) community of practice theory.

### **Teachers' Professional Learning in Communities of Practice**

Wenger's (1998) community of practice theory views human knowledge and meaning making as a natural aspect of social participation. This view has been widely taken up in educational spheres (Barton & Tusting, 2005; Levine, 2010), and accords with the situated and sociocultural perspectives of Gee (2011), Street and Rogers (2012) and The New London Group (1996, 2000). The following section outlines nested aspects of community of practice theory.

#### **Conceptualising communities of practice**

Wenger's (1998) social learning theory proposes that communities of practice form in the presence of the following conditions or domains:

- Mutual engagement: Learners are socially engaged in some form of negotiated action or practice.
- Joint enterprise: Learners jointly respond to a recognised goal or problem.
- Shared repertoire: Learners share stories, cultural resources and a language to talk about them.

Nested within these domains, learning unfolds through four interdependent processes:

- doing things together,
- negotiating meaning,
- engaging in communal inquiry, and
- changing social relations and identity.

Wenger (1998) asserts that learners shape these four processes to suit the shared purposes and goals of a particular community. In other words, certain meanings and practices become the focus of interactions in response to emergent collective goals. These goals may be either implicit or explicit. To identify the presence of domains and processes of learning within a community, Wenger presents a list of fourteen illustrative indicators (p. 125). These describe how learners negotiate challenges; foster new knowledge; innovate existing ways of doing things; engage with group culture and resources; and identify as belonging within the community's social relations, sense making and practices (p. 126). However, Wenger considers these indicators as nominal rather than definitive, because communities are diverse and undergo ongoing evolution.

Wenger (1998) also conceptualises how learners participate in overlapping discourses in different communities, which are part of the warp and weft of wider social and structural relations. That is, as part of 'multimembership' people move between different communities to fulfill social purposes and affiliations. This movement creates a flow of knowledge, practices and resources between communities. Therefore social knowledge/s, practices and identities are enlivened in variable ways across contexts, and communities exist in a state of flux as people (and cultural resources) move between them.

In earlier work with Jean Lave (Lave & Wenger, 1991), Wenger explained how people enter into a mature community of practice through the process of legitimate peripheral participation. This process describes how new members participate as novices at the periphery of

a community's practices and discourses. Gradually new members move into full membership and participation by engaging in shared doing, meaning making and identification with expert members. In other words, through increasing participation, learners appropriate implicit and explicit knowledge, practices and social norms established at the core of the community. During movement from peripheral to full participation, new members also reference shared understandings of what, how and why that community is constituted.

The openness and flexibility of community of practice theory has enriched research in a variety of disciplinary contexts (Levine, 2010). Wenger's (1998) theorising of domains and processes of learning is generally considered resilient (Barton & Tusting, 2005; Levine, 2010; Li, et al., 2009). However, debate has critiqued other elements of the theory. According to Levine (2010), purposeful research with community of practice theory should inquire into how and why communities operate, rather than simply whether they evolve. Important concerns for the present study include: the implication in the construct of legitimate peripheral participation that social learning is linear and produces power inequities between new and established members (Barton & Tusting, 2005; Levine, 2010; Li, et al., 2009); that in contemporary times, the purposes and discourses of communities may be co-opted by neoliberal interests and alliances (Gee, 2000); and that generating and identifying new communities may be quite different to studying established communities. Each of these issues will be outlined and commented on below.

### **Thinking critically about communities of practice**

A number of issues have emerged in relation to elements of Wenger's (1998) community of practice theory. For example, some theorists assert that the original construct of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991) did not sufficiently acknowledge reciprocity between new and established community members (Hung, Chen & Koh, 2006). Because the process of legitimate peripheral participation

positions existing members to socialise new members into established practices and discourse, a power imbalance is implied (Roberts, 2006). This hierarchical relationship is then reproduced during ongoing community maintenance, potentially creating a climate for static knowledge/s and practice/s. Although Wenger (1998) later explained dynamic processes for change and diversity through the construct of multimembership, power imbalances inherent in the construct of legitimate peripheral participation remained unaddressed (Levine, 2010).

In a related claim, some theorists believe that consensual processes in communities of practice may have been over-emphasised during wide uptake of the theory (Amin & Roberts, 2008; Opfer & Pedder, 2011; Roberts, 2006). This skew has emerged despite Wenger's (1998) explicit identification of negotiative and sociopolitical processes within communities of practice:

*A community of practice is neither a haven of togetherness nor an island of intimacy insulated from political and social relations. Disagreement, challenges, and competition can all be forms of participation . . . shared practice thus connects participants to each other in ways that are diverse and complex.*

(p. 77)

In view of potentially superficial readings of the theory, Levine (2010) cautions that applications of communities of practice must foreground critical inquiry and recognition of diversity, and must make considered reference to Wenger's (1998) non-prescriptive domain and process indicators (p. 125).

A second issue relates to influences on communities of practice in contexts dominated by capitalist discourses (Ditchburn, 2012; Lingard, 2010). In this climate, local purposes and discourses may be vulnerable to appropriation and standardisation in line with wider capitalist goals (Amin & Roberts, 2008; Gee, 2000; Levine, 2010; Li et al., 2009). Such an argument is coherent with situated and social learning perspectives (e.g. Gee, 2011; The New London Group, 1996, 2000), which view local

processes of learning as responsive-to and constitutive-of sociopolitical and cultural milieus. Some commentators claim that professional communities in the field of education are particularly subject to these influences, because teachers often value consensus and co-operation (Barton & Tusting, 2005; Levine, 2010). In view of this, the present study argues that participatory professional learning potentially pivots on teachers' trust and autonomy from wider coercive regulation, and teachers' willingness to adopt a critical stance on discourse.

Finally, some theorists have attempted to develop Wenger, McDermott and Snyder's (2002) assertion that while communities of practice can emerge naturalistically, they can also be designed and fostered. However, this prospect has raised important concerns about researcher and participant power imbalances, relating to how community purposes and discourses are conceived, facilitated and shared (Borzillo & Kaminska-Labbe, 2011; Roberts, 2006). While an integrated and dynamic theory of community creation is eagerly awaited, some theorists propose distinctions between beginning and mature communities. One proposal is that Wenger's (1998) community of practice domains and processes may emerge in weak, medium and strong versions (Admiraal, Lockhorst & van der Pol, 2012). Taking an alternate process stance, Borzillo and Kaminska-Labbe (2011) suggest that new communities may evolve through oscillating cycles of facilitation and self-organisation, where oscillations balance participation over time. While these studies are innovative, the present study focuses on the presence (rather than strength of) community of practice domains and processes, and argues that community driven rather than 'expert' driven purposes should be placed at the centre of generative efforts.

Of interest here, is the construct of reverse legitimate peripheral participation (Hung, Chen & Koh, 2006). This process describes how communities of practice can be generated by bringing teachers together to talk about shared interests and purposes, and by supporting ongoing



negotiation of these purposes. In this process, researchers focus on how meaningful interactions are created by and for the community, through mutual contributions of knowledge and resources. Hung, Chen and Koh claim this process sustains interest-driven discussion of pedagogy and practice.

In related work, Hung, Chee, Hedberg and Seng (2005) offer the notion of proscriptive design for co-determining communities of practice (p. 164). This approach aims to foster and support the mutual co-construction of learning and its social context, by setting minimal parameters on how participants contribute to and shape learning interactions. In this way, proscriptive design aims to 'loosely' facilitate conceptual, material and social conditions for learners to manifest their own goals and purposes. As a caveat, these authors allow that facilitation may sometimes include transitory episodes of simulation and shoulder-to-shoulder participation with an experienced other.

Taken together, reverse peripheral participation (Hung, Chen & Koh, 2006) and proscriptive design (Hung, Chee, Hedberg & Seng, 2005) suggest how communities of practice may be facilitated through responsivity and co-determination. These processes are consistent with democratic and situated aspects of pedagogy for multiliteracies (The New London Group, 1996, 2000), and participatory premises of professional learning (Mockler, 2013; Sachs, 2000). Further, from a sociocritical perspective (Gee, 2000; Levine, 2010; Opfer & Pedder, 2011) such an approach is potentially dynamic and reciprocal rather than linear and reproductive of social hierarchies.

Informed by Wenger's (1998) community of practice theory and the more recent construct of reverse legitimate peripheral participation (Hung, Chen & Koh, 2006), the present study explored how a small group of Western Australian public school teachers engaged with multiliteracies (Bull & Anstey, 2010; Cope & Kalantzis, 2013; The New London Group, 1996, 2000) during collective, social and purposeful learning. This sought to shed light on how teachers can collaboratively

develop understandings and knowledge about multiliteracies, and how this can be facilitated while putting teachers' purposes at the centre. The next section considers the book club metaphor as a way of garnering teachers' interest in such a project.

### **Scaffolding Community of Practice in a Book Club**

The book club metaphor was considered amenable for garnering teachers' interest in the current study. Clubs of various kinds have long been a popular way for people to engage with texts in the post-industrialised world. In the twentieth century, some book clubs were simply distribution lists for publishing houses (Neavill, 1971). However in recent times, informal face-to-face book clubs have enjoyed immense popularity across many countries including Australia, due in part to promotion by celebrities like Oprah Winfrey (Beach & Yussen, 2011; McMenemy, 2007). Traditionally book club activities have revolved around reading, response and discussion of a selection of book texts, typically although not exclusively attracting female membership (Burbank, Kauchak & Bates, 2010; Kooy, 2006).

Research on the characteristics of successful book clubs highlights the importance of a recreational and social atmosphere (Beach & Yussen, 2011). For the current study, the notion of a 'book club' was chosen for various reasons, in particular to suggest a relaxed atmosphere for learning, as well as a textually focused context. Further however, it was proposed in this study, that an expanded treatment of the book club concept could allow for participant meaning making about a variety of multimodal formats as well as print texts. This expansive treatment could gradually feed the group's problematisation of the printed 'book' as the primordial text of the modern world.

Recently, a small number of facilitated book clubs have informed theoretical research. One interesting example explored school nurses' participation in a book club to support ongoing professional learning and resilience (Greenawald & Adams, 2008). Book clubs designed

specifically for teachers include literature-circle-clubs (Monroe-Baillargeon & Shema, 2010) and video-clubs (van Es, 2012). Some studies identify the emergence of communities of practice. For example, Reilly (2008) in the USA claimed that four graduate-student elementary teachers self-organised a university structured book club into a community of practice. Drawing on situated learning theory, complexity theory and community of practice theory (Wenger, 1998), Reilly illuminated how these teachers negotiated understandings about classroom practices, through discussion and role-playing.

Of particular interest, Kooy (2006) facilitated an array of teacher book clubs in Canada, to support inquisitive, critical and reflexive professional learning for novice teachers. Drawing on various social learning theorists including Wenger (1998), Kooy argued that book clubs expose teachers to multiple perspectives about pedagogy and scaffold collegiate dialogue about wider literacy discourses. Utilising narrative methods, Kooy explored how several distinct groups of teachers built relationships to self-and-others through conversations about self-selected novels. She claims that facilitated book clubs draw teachers' knowledge, interests and attitudes into non-linear processes of learning, which feature collective inquiry. Such conditions resonate powerfully with the positioning of participatory professional learning (Mockler, 2013).

The idea of scaffolding learning is established in socio-cultural perspectives (Woods, Bruner & Ross, 1976). Scaffolding has often been associated with Vygotsky's (1978, 1986) zone of proximal development (Cumming-Potvin, Renshaw & van Kraayenoord, 2003; Rogoff, 1990). The scaffolding construct describes how a student traverses from their current profile of development towards potential or proximal knowledge/s, understandings and skills. Scaffolding is thought to support learning through timely and targeted assistance from other learners or peers, and features where learners engage in social

processes they would not experience independently. Communities of practice are thought to scaffold changing literacy understandings and practices, as learners purposefully engage with diverse peer perspectives and a range of resources (Mills, 2006).

Across research disciplines, scaffolding has sometimes been interpreted as unidirectional. However, contemporary researchers (Cumming-Potvin, Renshaw & van Kraayenoord, 2003; Cumming-Potvin, Baillie & Bowden, 2013; Green, 2005) acknowledge co-participatory, negotiated and dynamic learning processes. From this view, learners contribute reciprocally to learning during shared inquiry and meaning making. In the context of adult learning, Green (2005) recognises scaffolding as:

*Motivating others; understanding and working from people's capabilities; engaging learners in the challenge at hand; engaging in explicit discursal practices; finding a balance between autonomy and independence; providing demonstrations or examples and reflexivity including the ability to empathize.*

(p. 3)

These articulations resonate strongly with Hung, Chen and Koh's (2006) conceptualisation of reverse peripheral participation, where collaborative learning arises through learner determined processes and purposes.

During exploration of second-language learning contexts, Hammond and Gibbons (2005) and Cumming-Potvin, Renshaw and van Kraayenoord (2003) highlighted material, discursive and conceptual aspects of the scaffolding process. These two studies identify several important elements of planned scaffolding: sequencing; density of concepts; decision making about texts and artifacts; and the use of explicit metacognitive and metalinguistic supports. They also point to the benefits of interactional scaffolds: dialogue as a context for facilitating continuity and shared focus; the use of discursive reframing; exposure to multiple perspectives; responsiveness to participants' interests and motivations; and affective support. Many of these

scaffolds are integral to pedagogy for multiliteracies (The New London Group, 1996, 2000), and have an affinity with Wenger's (1998) theorising of social learning. Contemporary literacy theorists such as Kress (2010) and Gee (2011), assert that social learners are active and negotiative during meaning making, and that discursive negotiation responds to and constitutes the evolution of learners' practices, values, and knowledge.

The present inquiry meshed these perspectives and premises into a coherent theoretical framework. The framework has a consistent emphasis on diversity, social and situated learning, and equitable co-determination. Drawing on this framing, the study aimed to facilitate:

- teachers' participatory professional learning (Loughran, 2012; Mockler, 2013; Sachs, 2000); during
- processes of negotiation (Kress, 2010; Wenger, 1998).

In addition, the study sought insights into relationships between multiliteracies (Bull & Anstey, 2010; Cope & Kalantzis, 2013; The New London Group, 1996, 2000) and community of practice (Wenger, 1998) conditions and processes of learning occurring in the book club context.

## **Chapter Summary**

Chapter Two has described major influences on literacy teaching and learning in Australia. These influences include historical shifts in approaches to literacy, and the emergence of multiliteracies theory (The New London Group, 1996, 2000). Imperatives to transform literacy education have been considered in light of communicative trends and the dominance of traditional and transmissive constructions of literacy pedagogy. It has been argued that participatory versions of professional learning enable teachers to develop and participate in multiliteracies discourse, with relevance to communications now prevalent in twenty-first century Australia. This study has contextualised participatory professional learning in Wenger's (1998)

community of practice theory. Kooy's (2006) teacher book club metaphor has been described and expanded for orchestrating teachers' informal participatory learning around a variety of texts. The next chapter outlines and justifies research methodology, design and methods of inquiry.

## **CHAPTER THREE METHODOLOGY AND METHODS**

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Chapter Two reviewed the theoretical and contextual background of literacy and teacher professional learning in Australia, making recommendations for this study. Chapter Three outlines choices of methodology and methods, in alignment with the theoretical framework. The chapter begins by examining methodology: the researcher's assumptions and position in regard to qualitative research and design of the study. The second section explains how sampling and recruitment strategies were used to form a case, and represents characteristics of the group. The two book club sites are also described. Methods of data generation and the book club sequence are outlined in the third section. Final sections of this chapter justify methods of data representation and analysis. The entire research process was focused through the four research questions:

1. How do these teachers' perceptions and knowledge of literacy develop through five book club meetings?
2. How do these teachers articulate engagement with multimodality through the book club?
3. What are teachers' perceptions of professional learning about literacy in the current context of public primary school education? And lastly,
4. How can the book club format contribute to the development of a community of practice?

### **Methodology and Research Design**

An important part of the researcher's work is to examine methodology: the alignment of theoretical premises with choices of research approach and method (Carter & Little, 2007). In doing so, the researcher acknowledges that these premises and choices both frame and constitute knowledge: they embody beliefs about the world and its phenomena, and the possibility of obtaining knowledge of it (Carter & Little, 2007; Koro-Ljungberg, Yendol-Hoppey, Smith, & Hayes, 2009). In

consequence, assumptions undergirding research need to be made explicit, so that aims, methods and claims are transparent and justifiable (Crotty, 1998). Working towards this transparency, the next section considers epistemological foundations of this study.

### **Epistemology and the research paradigm**

Epistemological beliefs come into play during all phases of the research process. Epistemology concerns our beliefs about how knowledge can be constructed, shared and understood (Crotty, 1998). In this study, research inquiry focuses on teachers' diverse discursive and social processes. Such inquiry assumes that people know-and-create-knowledge in different ways, and that researchers can have insight into these processes. This draws on a family of epistemological positions:

- The 'constructivist' position asserts that people actively use human perception and cognition to know the world (Crotty, 1998).
- This positioning is extended in the 'social constructionist' perspective, which views knowledge as a sociocultural phenomenon (Crotty, 1998; Gee, 2011). From this view, people generate diverse knowledge and meaning about the world during social interactions, and knowledge is valued and enacted in different ways across different sociocultural contexts.
- Extending the social constructionist position, Guba and Lincoln (2008) offer the 'participatory' position, to highlight how knowledge is generated in communities of inquiry, where learners are active in accessing and constructing knowledge through shared practice and discussion in context.

These positions cohere in the theoretical framework of this study, which encompasses the work of Gee (2011), Kress (2010), The New London Group (2000) and Wenger (1998). This coherence supports



justifiable claims about teachers' social construction of knowledge and discursive participation in the multiliteracies book club.

Taking social constructionist and participatory epistemological positions, this study orients to an interpretive qualitative approach (Crotty, 1998; Creswell, 2013). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) refer to qualitative research in the following way:

*Qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.*

(p. 3)

Denzin and Lincoln explain further, that qualitative researchers make claims about human meaning making and experience by developing and interpreting thick descriptions of social phenomena in context. First used by Ryle (1968) and later developed by Geertz (1973), thick description implies layered and rich accounts of researched phenomena. This leads qualitative researchers to pursue descriptive depth rather than generalisation, about a small number of actors within the context of their interactions and experience (Creswell, 2013; Crotty, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Yin, 2012). In this quest for thick description, qualitative researchers are also careful to acknowledge the limits of claims. For instance, Denzin and Lincoln (2011) explain that qualitative researchers use a variety of methods for data generation and analysis, to strengthen rigor and trustworthiness. But this multi-method approach is not seen as a way of validating reality, because in a qualitative approach, reality is seen as variable and socially constructed. Rather, the researcher recognises non-closure of meaning making, and the impossibility of achieving a finite construction of 'truth' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). However, while seeking to make some claims rather than others, the researcher does consider how different actors were positioned in the process, and 'whose' truths are being represented.

## Researcher positioning

The design of this study was intended to enable teacher's voicing and participatory learning processes. Data generation, representation and analysis were not intended to focus in detail on researcher input. This emphasis on participant perspectives and processes is consistent with the study's theoretical framework, which premised:

- a participatory epistemological position (Guba & Lincoln, 2008);
- principles of a pedagogy of multiliteracies (The New London Group, 1996, 2000);
- co-participatory aspects of community of practice theory (Hung, Chen & Koh, 2006; Wenger, 1998);
- proscriptive facilitation of social learning environments (Cumming-Potvin, Renshaw & van Kraayenoord, 2003; Green, 2005; Hung, Chee, Hedberg & Seng 2005); and
- participatory constructions of professional learning (Mockler, 2013; Sachs, 2000).

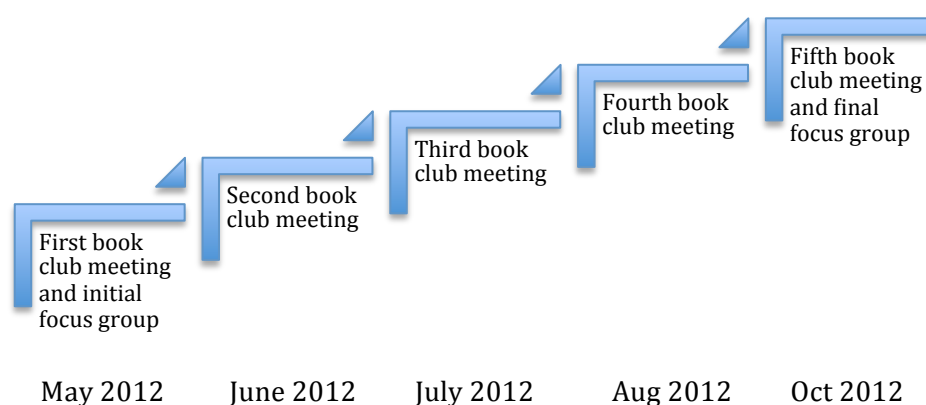
Following from the above premises, design of book club activities, scaffolds and focuses was intended to be proscriptive rather than prescriptive, to enable gradual co-determination of group processes and purposes (Hung, Chee, Hedberg & Seng 2005). Proscriptive facilitation necessarily requires the researcher's ongoing reflection on a number of tensions. These include how and why interactions with participants are enacted, interpreted and represented (Schwandt, 2000). Stich, Cipollone, Nikischer and Weis (2012) explain that transparency requires iterative interrogation of how relationships and judgements are put into play *for* participants' interests. These authors argue that reflection does not seek to emphasise the researcher's participation per se (unless this is the focus of a study), but to uncover the social, material and political circumstances in which particular knowledge claims have been brought into being. The following section begins to explain how participation was given form through case study design.

## Case study design

Guided by the research questions, this study aimed towards thick description of a single case at the group level (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002; Saldana, 2011; Yin, 2012). Case studies characterise and analyse relationships between a limited number of conditions and phenomena, located in a particular context or entity (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2012). While case studies can be designed for multi-site comparisons, or focus on individuals (Hammersley, 2013; Saldana, 2011; Yin, 2012), the present study focused on the interactions and meaning making of one small group of seven teachers. The case took form in five book club meetings, where teachers collaboratively explored, discussed and added to a wide range of multimodal texts, literacy resources and practices. The five meetings were proscriptively designed (Hung, Chee, Hedberg & Seng, 2005) to scaffold recursive participation in multiliteracies knowledge dimensions (The New London Group, 1996, 2000). Figure 1 illustrates the timing of the five book club meetings.

**Figure 1**

*Chronology of the five book club meetings*



Meeting activities were planned to be facilitatory, and to alternate with emergent peer-led conversational opportunities. This was aimed to gradually position teachers to express, discuss and act on self-perceived purposes and interests. This positioning is consistent with theorising of communities of practice (Hung, Chen & Koh, 2006; Wenger, 1998), multiliteracies pedagogy (The New London Group,

1996, 2000), and scaffolding as a process of reciprocal and dynamic development (Cumming-Potvin, Renshaw & van Kraayenoord, 2003; Cumming-Potvin, Baillie & Bowden, 2013; Green, 2005).

In caveat, this study was not theorised to focus on individual differences between teachers. As an example, it does not explore in depth how teachers' biographies contribute to individual meaning making (see Strong-Wilson, 2008). Neither does it focus on particularities of individual participants, but treats participant diversity as a characteristic of the group case. Additionally, because the study focused on interactions and discourses as they emerged within the book club, teachers' reports about their practices outside of the book club were not taken as evidence of practice per se, but as evidence of teachers' understandings and perspectives, and how these evolved over five months. The next section gives more detail about the actual case.

### **The Book Club Case**

This section describes sampling and recruitment procedures, characteristics of participants at the group level, and book club sites. Later parts of the chapter describe methods of data generation, and data representation and analysis.

#### **Sampling and recruitment**

Before recruitment commenced, institutional ethics approval (**Appendix B**) was received from The Department of Education, Western Australia and Murdoch University Western Australia. Ethical guidelines and provisions were developed in collaboration with university supervisors. Within this process, informed consent attended to the ethical rights of participants.

Seven practicing primary school teachers were recruited from five public primary schools, in one low-socio-economic, outer metropolitan district of Western Australia. Convenience sampling (Patton, 2002; Saldana, 2011) from one educational district was adopted so that teachers from one geographical location could attend common book

club meetings. The researcher had no existing professional relationships in this locality.

After making contact by telephone, the researcher discussed the aims and design of the study with willing school principals at a brief face-to-face meeting. These principals were given a package containing principal- and teacher-information-sheets and consent forms (**Appendix C**). Principals were informed that consent to allow participant recruitment from school sites was voluntary, and that teachers' potential participation in the study was also entirely voluntary. An explicit condition of teachers' participation was that book club processes were to remain separate from schools' administrative involvement or professional development routines, and that individual teachers' participation would not be disclosed to schools. This aimed to protect book club processes from administratively imposed learning purposes. If the principal was interested in providing access, they were asked to sign the principal consent form. Sometimes this was left for consideration, and collected later.

Teacher information sheets described the purposes of the research, procedures, possible risks and benefits of participation, and intended ethical protections. These included the researcher's maintenance of confidentiality and participant anonymity. Information sheets were distributed to whole school staff, either through staffroom pigeonholes, and/or at a brief talk given by the researcher. Interested volunteers were invited to contact the researcher by mobile phone or email. Later, after establishing informed consent, the researcher collected signed consent forms in a neutral location. At this time, the researcher asked teacher volunteers whether they felt coerced or obligated to participate. No coercion was reported. The researcher endeavoured to protect participants from public identification by using established ethical protocols: teacher identities were kept confidential by the university research team; and referred to through pseudonyms and/or codes in

research generated documents, transcripts, reflections and published materials.

### **Ethical considerations regarding recruitment**

The researcher engaged in two instances of explicit ethical decision-making early in the project. First during the recruitment phase, two principals asked to host the study on school sites. In these scenarios, the researcher thanked the principals for their interest, but reiterated that the study was designed for a small interest-driven group of teachers, independent of school routines. Second, after the group had commenced meetings, two additional teachers unexpectedly volunteered for participation. This was taken as possibly indicating strong interest in the group's activities and focus. However unfortunately, due to the short time frame of the study, it was jointly decided that these volunteers would not begin participation part way through the study. The researcher thanked these two teachers for their support and interest. The next subsection describes background characteristics of the seven teachers who comprised the book club group.

### **Group level description of participants**

A short background questionnaire (**Appendix D**) gathered non-sensitive demographic information about the teachers, such as teaching role, years of teaching experience, main qualifications and educational interests. The questionnaire was distributed at the first book club meeting. Collection of this information was important for two reasons: it contributed to thick description of the case (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Yin, 2012); and aided the researcher in tailoring resources and activities to teachers' interests and prior experiences. Table 2 below profiles group characteristics in categories.

**Table 2***Characteristics of the group case: Participant background demographics*

Characteristic	Number of participants by category	
Gender	Female 7	Other 0
First language	English speaking 7	Languages other than English 0
Country of birth	Australia 6	Lebanon 1
Years of teaching	Over 10 years 6	5 to 10 years 1
Age range	46 to 55 years 5	35 to 45 years 2

Semi-structured responses to the background questionnaire indicated that as a group, the teachers had practiced in many public primary teaching contexts across metropolitan and remote Western Australia. These ranged from: Kindergarten to Year 7 classroom teaching; policy development; English, Science and Early Childhood learning area co-ordination; Aboriginal Education; Special Needs Education; First Steps Getting it Right for Literacy (GIRL) co-ordination; and co-ordination of Students at Educational Risk (SAER). At the time of the study, the seven teachers were working in five different schools, mainly in the early years of schooling. It is notable that the teachers comprised an experienced group. The researcher took advantage of this background information by proscriptively tailoring scaffolds and resources from the second meeting onwards, to the early childhood phase of teaching and learning. The physical setting of the book club is described next.

### **The book club sites**

The five book club meetings took place at two municipal community centres. Meeting dates and times were negotiated to fit teachers' work and family commitments. The first three meetings took place at a venue with contemporary corporate styling, which included a digital projector and executive furnishings. Figure 2 below depicts this setting. The venue was located on a local café strip, to foster a social and relaxed atmosphere. The researcher brought tea, coffee, pastries, cakes and flowers to each meeting.

**Figure 2**  
*First venue*



A second community centre was used for the fourth and fifth meetings. The second centre was older than the first, and styled for family groups like play-group. It did not have installed technology, and featured fold-up furniture. Figure 3 below depicts an area of the community centre used by the book club group. The centre was situated amongst leafy gardens on a suburban street.



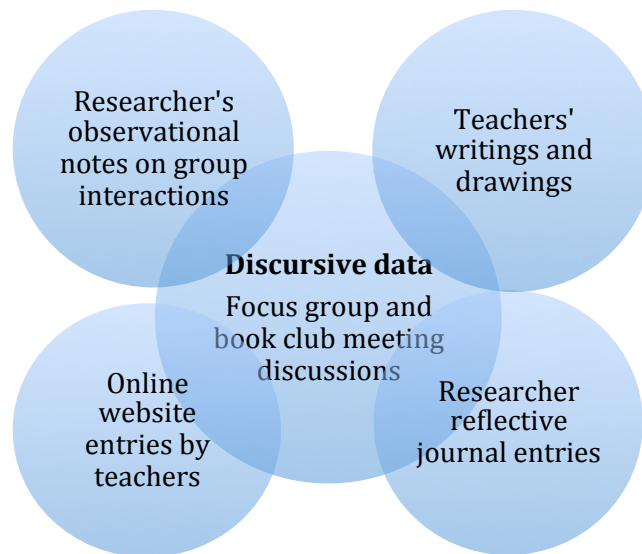
**Figure 3**  
*Second venue*



### **Data Generation**

A variety of methods were used to generate descriptions of teachers' evolving perspectives, knowledge/s and practices. Using multiple methods to generate data fosters opportunities for thick qualitative description (Geertz, 1973). A feature of the qualitative case study approach is that different data can be generated about the same phenomena, allowing the researcher to make claims through a coherent set of interpretive practices (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). This method is referred to as 'triangulation' (Flick, 2007; Patton, 2002). These strategies contributed to rigour within the limits of the time frame and scope of this study. Complementarity between discursive and secondary data is depicted below in Figure 4.

**Figure 4**  
*Primary and secondary data sources*



The next subsection details methods used to generate this range of data. Methods included: discussion-based book club meetings; initial- and final-focus groups embedded in the first and last book club meetings; researcher observations of face-to-face interactions; written and drawn artefacts produced by teachers during planned activities; teachers' entries on a multiliteracies book club website; and researcher journal reflections.

### **Book club meetings**

This subsection describes the range of data generation methods.

### ***Initial and final focus groups***

Focus group segments were designed to fit seamlessly into the beginning of the first meeting, and the end of the final meeting. Beginning-and-end focus groups (Patton, 2002) create potential for researchers and participants to recognise changing perspectives, knowledge/s and participation. In this study, focus group interactions were semi-structured, allowing the researcher to guide and support dialogue (Patton, 2002). The use of focus questions (**Appendix E**)

helped the researcher shape group conversation around substantive issues, while easing and encouraging flow. Each focus question related to an aspect of the four research questions, spanning teachers' views on professional learning, literacy, teaching practice and perceptions of the book club. In the interim between focus group sessions, the group engaged in a series of meeting activities, which are described next.

### ***The first meeting***

In the first meeting, group interactions were mainly facilitated through semi-structured prompts and relationship building activities. The teachers had previously consented to having their dialogue recorded on two digital audio recording devices, which were located at different points in the room. A summary of proscriptively designed activities for the first meeting is provided below in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Summary of activities designed for the first meeting*

Activity	Detail
Welcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formal welcome, refreshment and orientation</li> <li>• Completion of background questionnaire</li> <li>• Icebreaker</li> </ul>
Semi-structured focus group	Guided by focus questions
Explore the multiliteracies perspective	View and discuss two videos about the multiliteracies perspective
Explore postmodern picture books	Teachers select and peruse a text from the postmodern picture book collection
Consider multiliteracies strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The researcher models strategies and online resources</li> <li>• Teachers discuss informally</li> </ul>
General discussion	Teachers reflect on the book club, make suggestions for the next meeting agenda, and select the next meeting date

Postmodern picture books were chosen by the researcher as a stimulus for discussion in the first meeting. These texts feature multimodal, meta-fictional and multilayered text, in a format that many primary teachers find recognisable (Bull & Anstey, 2010). These books can be particularly engaging because they feature narrative and visual devices that seem to defy the storybook genre. According to Bull and Anstey (2010), postmodern picture books include one or more of the following: non-traditional plot structures; non-linear story telling or overlapping stories; unconventional use of images to position either the reader or characters in surprising ways; novel layouts such as back-to-front or upside down pages; and layered application of genres.

The researcher had collected and taught with postmodern picture books over several years, and had sometimes engaged school colleagues in discussions about them during her facilitation of school-based team work. The collection used in the present study included many quality texts, some of which are recommended by Bull and Anstey (2010), and have received Children's Book Council of Australia (2007-2012) and American Library Association (1996-2013) awards.

**Appendix F** describes the key features of each text. Serendipitously, several of the texts were written for young audiences, potentially resonating with the interests of early childhood teachers in the book club group. The researcher invited the teachers to borrow texts for extended viewing, and to bring their own texts in prospective meetings.

### ***The second meeting***

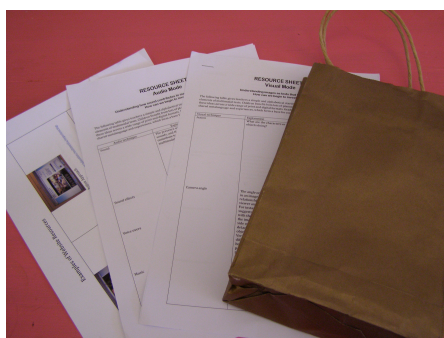
About one month later, the second meeting offered recursive opportunities for developing literacy understandings and practices. In particular, the researcher aimed to scaffold overt and collaborative opportunities around multiliteracies metalanguage, in response to teachers' expressions of interest at the end of the first meeting. A summary of activities for the second meeting appears below in Table 4.

**Table 4**  
*Summary of activities designed for the second meeting*

Activity	Detail
Welcome	Informal refreshment and discussion
Discussion of a quote about multimodality	Selected by the researcher from Anstey & Bull (2009, p. 4)
Straw handle bag of resource sheets	Explore researcher-made resource sheets provided in individual string-handled paper bags
Use the resource sheets for meaning making with postmodern picture books	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In pairs and triads, teachers choose a postmodern picture-book from the collection to peruse, supported by resource sheets</li> <li>• Informal whole discussion</li> </ul>
Consider multiliteracies strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The researcher models various strategies and online resources</li> <li>• Informal discussion</li> </ul>
Introduce the <i>MultiliteraciesBookClub</i> website	The researcher models the website and the group discuss its operation
General discussion	Teachers reflect on their experience of the book club, make suggestions for the next meeting agenda, and select the next meeting date

Resource sheets were designed to scaffold teachers' engagement with multiliteracies metalanguage. Each sheet was adapted from the content of Walsh (2011) and Bull and Anstey (2010). The set included: a list of useful websites sourced from the researcher's professional experiences of classroom practice; and separate resource sheets for the visual, audio and gestural modes. Sheets depicted a table of specialised metalanguage, an explanation of each term, and indicative focus questions for supporting student learning in the classroom. As an example, an excerpt of the visual mode resource sheet can be viewed in **Appendix G**. Figure 5 below depicts a set of resource sheets provided to each teacher in a string-handle paper bag.

**Figure 5**  
*String handle paper bag with resource sheets*



### ***The third meeting***

The researcher proscriptively prepared a small number of activities for the third meeting, to scaffold discussion of multiliteracies planning and assessment practices. However in contrast to previous meetings, these were intended to alternate with unstructured discussion opportunities. Table 5 below summarises activities of the third meeting.

**Table 5**  
*Summary of activities designed for the third meeting*

Activity	Detail
Welcome	Informal refreshment and discussion
Consider multiliteracies planning and assessment	View and discuss a video featuring Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis.
Rotating messages	Teachers discuss researcher prompts: <i>Social learning means? Technology in the classroom is? Critical engagement with literacy means? Successful multimodal learning might be about?</i>
Unstructured sharing of teacher-sourced texts and resources	Informal sharing and modeling of texts and resources by teachers
Planning multiliteracies teaching and learning	Teachers collaboratively view a multimodal digital text on a shared laptop; and design hypothetical learning for students
General discussion	Teachers reflect on the book club, make suggestions for the next meeting agenda, and select the next meeting date

### ***The fourth meeting***

The researcher continued to support teachers' knowledge building by introducing them to a range of websites, videos and modelled strategies for multiliteracies practice. At the same time, researcher facilitation was intended to fade, so that teachers' unstructured participation and interest-driven discussion could emerge more strongly. Consequently in this meeting, the researcher facilitated only minimally. Activities of the fourth meeting are summarised below in Table 6.

**Table 6**  
*Summary of activities designed for the fourth meeting*

Activity	Detail
Welcome	Informal refreshments and discussion
<b><i>Alternating</i></b> Open-ended sharing of teacher-sourced materials and discussion points	Modeling and discussion of strategies, online resources, points of interest and pedagogical issues
<b><i>and</i></b> Researcher sharing of strategies and resources	For instance, guided viewing of the 'Teaching Teachers for the Future' package.
General discussion	Teachers reflect on the book club, make suggestions for the next meeting agenda, and select the final meeting date

### ***The fifth meeting***

In this final meeting, the researcher invited teachers to use colouring and poster materials to create an individual 'storymap' of their experiences in the multiliteracies book club. Afterwards, each teacher used the storymap as an aid to verbal description of their experience of the book club. This process was designed to prime the final focus group segment. At the end of this meeting, the researcher invited teachers to ask questions about the research, and to view transcripts at a future

date. To conclude the study, the teachers were thanked for their participation. These activities are summarised below in Table 7.

**Table 7**  
*Summary of activities designed for the fifth meeting*

Activity	Detail
Welcome	Informal refreshments and discussion
<b><i>Alternating</i></b> Open-ended sharing of teacher-sourced materials and discussion points	Modeling and discussion of strategies, online resources and pedagogical issues
<b><i>and</i></b> Researcher sharing of strategies and resources	
Storymapping the book club experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers each draw a storymap poster</li> <li>• Teachers describe their storymaps</li> </ul>
Semi-structured focus group	Guided by the focus questions
Conclusion of the book club	The researcher thanks the teachers for their participation and interest. Teachers are invited to view the meeting transcripts at a later date.

In addition to activities in the five book club meetings, the researcher employed a range of complementary methods to generate data about the multiliteracies book club case. The next subsections outline these methods.

### **Observational notes**

Since people use a range of modes to communicate (Gee, 2011; Kress, 2010), the researcher recorded some non-linguistic information about the group's interactions. Notes included: teachers' choices of seating arrangement; and some of their facial expressions, gestures and mannerisms during discussions. These notes were used to annotate meeting transcripts (see annotated transcript example **Appendix H**). Qualitative researchers recognise that this information can be important for interpreting social interactions in a group (Gee, 2011;



Yin, 2012). That being said, the researcher acknowledges that observational processes are always influenced by assumptions and biases (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Gee, 2011; Schwandt, 2000). The researcher attempted to examine these biases through researcher journaling, which is described in a later section. For now, description turns to the different types of resources used in the book club.

## **Resources**

Teachers' interacted with three types of material resources: designed scaffolds; teacher-created products and drawings; and teacher-sourced texts and resources. Interactions with these different types of resources enabled teachers to demonstrate and speak about unfolding perspectives, practices and understandings. The researcher took a special interest in resources sourced by teachers. These included iPad applications such as *Storykit HD* (University of Maryland, 2013), and picture books such as *The Paper Bag Princess* (Munsch, 1980). For Wenger (1998), selection of and talk about such resources and objects, can represent a 'nexus' of shared meaning making (p. 108). Some of these resources (such as designed scaffolds) were uploaded onto the multiliteracies book club website for teachers' informal access. This website is described next.

## **The multiliteracies book club website**

The website was designed to support discussion and resource sharing between meeting times. However, despite teachers' expressed intentions to use the website, they claimed that time constraints and work commitments limited this involvement. The website was constructed with the assistance of Murdoch University's School of Education IT communications officer. The site was registered as a password-controlled private online space, and comprised welcome, glossary, resource and discussion-board pages (see screen shot examples **Appendix I**). Teachers received a private emailed invite to the site immediately after the first meeting. The researcher explicitly

modelled site operation during the second book club meeting, and offered all teachers ongoing technical support throughout further meetings. Although each teacher logged on to the website at least once during the book club, this usually involved simply leaving a greeting to the group, and then downloading resource sheets. The researcher's dilemmas and decision making about the online space were recorded in journaling, a method described next.

### **Researcher journaling**

Qualitative researchers agree that inquiries into social phenomena are complex and rooted in subjective processes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Schwandt, 2000). That is to say, researchers enact subjective views during social, cultural and political relationships with participants, and during research design (Carter & Little, 2007; Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2009; Schwandt, 2000). Journaling is a recognised research practice for heightening awareness of ties between subjectivity, methodological choices, and social meaning making (Holloway & Biley, 2011; Watt, 2007). One important consideration is how researchers position themselves in the research process, and how this affects the way participants' voices can be accessed, interpreted and represented (Watt, 2007).

During this study, the researcher was both a participant and a university researcher, which meant that dilemmas about her overlapping identities and roles sometimes arose. These overlapping 'ways of being' (Yin, 2011) included (but were not limited to): being a supportive facilitator; 'standing back' as an observer; sometimes acting as a provocateur; and sometimes acknowledging and agreeing with teacher concerns based on common teaching experiences. Puzzling on these complexities and contradictions expands the researcher's theoretical grasp, and repertoire of responses (Watt, 2007).

Journaling was specifically used to build this awareness, and to track investments in the project. Consequently, a multi-genre collection of reflective journal entries was generated. This included reflections on: role enactment, ideas for meeting activities, affective responses to participants, and theoretical musings. Sometimes entries were shared with university supervisors, particularly during the beginning stages of the project. Supervisors' reciprocal reflections helped to guide and extend the researchers' scope, skills and justifications. Later, reflections became important to formal processes of analysis, which are elaborated in another section of this chapter.

The following examples illustrate how journaling contributed to transparent and justifiable decision-making. One cluster related to similarities and differences between researcher and teacher perspectives. This prompted teasing out of overlaps and slippages in positioning. Implied was a need to simultaneously: respect the diverse perspectives of the teachers (Schwandt, 2000), as well as to 'make the familiar strange' through theoretical and intellectual work (Delamont, Atkinson & Pugsley, 2010). For instance, shortly after the first meeting in May 2012, the following reflection was entered:

*I am wondering about critical space to view what the teachers are saying with detachment. Is this a part of the participant observer research relationship? I already feel a sense of loyalty to the participants, and I think I will find it difficult to separate my views from theirs. Perhaps this is an artifact of community of practice, belonging and shared practice, respect and trust.*

At several points, musings were accompanied by drawn and found portraits. Sometimes, drawings represented the researcher's perception of her complex positioning. For instance contrasting layers of the portrait in Figure 6 below simultaneously represented her identity within the project as a caring people-oriented person (outward persona), and as a theoretical collector and interpreter of data. This is suggested in the juxtaposition of 'steam punk' (mechanised) intellectual workings, with a softened empathetic outer appearance and

gaze. At other times, this portrait also represented the researcher's perceptions of knowing and benevolent university supervisors.

**Figure 6**

*Research journal drawing: Portrait*



The balancing of conversational opportunities was a recurring focus. In this vein, the following reflection was entered just after the second meeting:

*I have tried to make more opportunities for the participants to engage, to dialogue, and to question. On the other hand, it's still little steps and perhaps at times I am scanning them to try and make on-the-spot judgements about their readiness to question and discuss. This meeting for instance, although there were still many unproductive pauses as I waited to see if they would take up a discussion opportunity, there were also more independent exchanges without my support.*

Overall, reflective entries point to the researcher's attempts to develop methodological awareness. In the examples above, these efforts focused on: issues of identity, justification of methodological choices, and the impact of these choices on the representation of teachers' voiced perspectives and learning processes.

So far, a range of data generation methods has been outlined. The next section describes how data were managed, represented and analysed.

## **Data Representation and Analysis**

This section details how data were collected, managed and analysed. The first subsection describes transcription and data management. The second subsection describes a five-phased cycle of analysis (Yin, 2011), and layering of interpretive techniques. Choices of method aimed to be consistent with socio-constructionist and participatory premises (Crotty, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 2008), for instance by prioritising teachers' voiced perspectives and processes of learning.

### **Transcription and data management**

Two Olympus digital audio-devices recorded meeting dialogue. The use of two recorders was helpful for capturing and crosschecking dialogue, with the aim of achieving a high level of integrity. Audio recordings were manually transcribed by the researcher in the days soon after each meeting, resulting in five chronological transcripts. Each transcript was prefaced with contextual information, such as meeting time, place, and attendance (using a pseudonym for each teacher). All utterances were numbered in sequence, alongside a column for brief observational notes and sketches. Each of the completed transcripts was audited twice. One month after the final book club meeting, one teacher was available to meet with the researcher over coffee, to view the transcripts. No changes were made, and the teacher mainly expressed curiosity about the transcription process itself.

A manual approach to transcription was preferred, allowing the researcher to take advantage of immersion in the data (Saldana, 2011; Yin, 2011). To support consistency, the researcher developed a transcription protocol (**Appendix J**). The work of Gee (2011) and McLellan, MacQueen and Neidig (2003) guided conventions. Further to these efforts, the researcher acknowledges that the transcription process was complex. Listening, matching and making decisions about teachers' meaning making required interpretative work. This highlights how trustworthy representation of participant voices in qualitative

analysis springs from respect for ambiguity (Gee, 2011; Schwandt, 2000). Decision making was tracked during journalling.

Other sources of data, such as teacher writings, drawings and screen shots of the multiliteracies book club website, were collected in a file and kept in a locked cupboard. Analysis of this array of data is described in the following subsections.

### **The five-phased analysis cycle**

Analysis was theorised through socio-constructionist and participatory lenses (Flick, 2007; Guba & Lincoln, 2008; Schwandt, 2000). The aim of analysis was to create thick description of discursive and contextual data (Geertz, 1973). Yin (2011) suggests that in qualitative case studies, analysis emerges through an iterative cycle. This typically features both inductive and deductive processes. Table 8 below, fits this study's analytical methods with Yin's (2011) five phases.

**Table 8***Summary of qualitative methods of analysis across five phases*

	Analytical techniques	Significant theorists
Phase one	Preliminary interpretation and ongoing decision making within the research process	Carter & Little (2007); Denzin & Lincoln (2008); Holloway & Biley (2011); Schwandt (2000); Watt (2007); Yin (2011)
Phase two	Open coding of themed categories on <i>Word</i> document arrays	Yin (2011)
Phase three	CDA tools: 'Making significant connections' and 'Identity building' arrays	Gee (2000, 2011)
Phase four	Revisiting theoretical frameworks; Triangulation	The New London Group (1996, 2000); Kress (2010); Wenger (1998); Yin (2012)
Phase five	Storying the analysis; Accounting for rival explanations	Flick (2007); Gee (2011); Saldana (2011); Yin (2012)

***Phase one***

The first phase of analysis diffused through the whole data generation process. This is because the researcher's ongoing re/positioning and decision making implies interpretive work (Carter & Little, 2007; Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2009; Patton, 2002; Yin, 2011). In this study, early interpretive work involved: responsive design of scaffolds (activities, resources and opportunities), recording of observational notes, and transcription. As noted in an earlier section of this chapter, these processes were tracked during researcher journaling.

## ***Phase two***

In the second phase, transcripts were reviewed for emerging themes and patterns. Categorisation involved a search for similarities and differences, which Yin (2011) describes as exploratory disassembling and reassembling (p. 176). During this early stage, theoretical framing balances with a deeply empirical focus (Flick, 2007; Patton, 2002; Yin, 2011, 2012). In part, this empirical focus aided immersion in the whole data set, offsetting potential tendencies to gravitate towards extreme or theoretically amenable fragments of the data. The researcher began this process by colour coding segments of transcripts for key theoretical constructs. An indicative list of coding constructs is presented below in Table 9.

**Table 9**

*Key coding constructs derived from theoretical frames*

Multiliteracies dimensions	Multimodality	Literacy in context	Professional learning	Social learning
Situated practice	Multimodality	Binary constructions	Events	Interests
Overt instruction	Metalanguage	Australian Curriculum	Content	Goals
Critical framing	Technology	Policy	Delivery	Belonging
Transformed practice			Relationship to practice	Trust Peer feedback

Colour coded segments were collated in *Microsoft Word* document arrays, and compared for similarities and differences. Coding for key constructs was considered a first level of coding (Level 1 code). Within these categories, utterances were sorted further into empirically emergent patterns (Level 2 code). An example of two-level coding is illustrated below in Table 10.



**Table 10**  
*Example of two-level coding of discursive data*

Level 1 Code	Level 2 Code	Transcript Excerpt
Metalanguage	Foreign language	<i>the modes . . oh the language is foreign . . how to talk about it?</i>
	Traditional framing	<i>I know but am I the only one, I might sound different than everybody else, but I don't find this is a new thing.</i>

While commitment to these interpretations was suspended pending deeper analysis, two-level coding created a context for examining diversity in the discursive data. In continuation of this process, emerging patterns were examined more deeply during phase three of analysis.

### ***Phase three***

In the third phase, discursive data were analysed line-by-line using Gee's (2011) critical discourse analysis. According to Gee (2011), language has social functions: We use language to do certain social, political and cultural things; and these functions correspond with particular formations of language. Gee (2004) makes this process explicit:

*A discourse analytic analysis of learning, then, needs to show how a distinctive community of practice is constituted out of specific social practices (across time and space) and how patterns of participation systematically change across time, both for individuals and the community of practice as a whole (or distinctive parts of it).*

(p. 39)

In critical discourse analysis (Gee, 2011), selected tools are used to build descriptions of meanings and functions as they appear in language. While doing so, the following questions act as a guide:

- What particular meanings appear significant, and how is significance signalled?
- How are practices put into play, and how do these practices relate to wider cultural or institutional discourses?
- How are social relationships acted-out and attributed during interactions?

In this study, critical discourse analysis proceeded iteratively, and was recorded on multipage chronological *Microsoft Word* document matrices. Separate matrices were constructed for each meeting, and collated into a larger collection. An excerpt of one matrix is depicted below in Figure 7.

**Figure 7**

*Excerpt from a critical discourse analysis matrix*

504 As fast as I think we need to go/ I really thought/ I just need to feel for myself that I'm covering/ <b>(purpose)</b>			507 <b>(Mirroring relational)</b> I'll just support that <b>(Immediate present)</b> / I find [standards]/I would like to/ <b>(purpose)</b>
	517 When I first started <b>(past)</b> / I just felt so immensely overwhelmed/ I felt like it was overtaking/ So I've had to work out ways/ I feel like I'm still fitting <b>(present)</b> <b>(Mini narrative)</b>		

Matrices were used to interpret the way discourse in the book club gave significance to particular meanings and practices, and how social relationships were attributed and enacted in the book club. Teachers' comments about practices, interactions and events outside the book club were also of interest to the study. The researcher again moved between empirical and theoretical lenses, a process that continued in phase four.

### ***Phase four***

The fourth phase of analysis involved a new cycle of deduction and induction (Yin, 2011). The aim was to develop more nuanced interpretations of patterns in the data. Consequently, complementary patterns across data sources and matrices were considered, and theoretical frameworks were revisited. Emergent interpretations resonated strongly with the work of Kress (2010), who theorises how meaning is socially negotiated. For Kress, meaning making over time involves actors in appropriation, re-contextualisation, and re/negotiation of meanings and practices. Consequently, changes and shifts in discourse were explored. The term 'diachronic' change is used to refer to this remaking of meaning and perspective over time. A particular focus on change is consistent with the situated perspective of Wenger (1998), which theorises how some meanings and practices are reified over others within communities. Gee's tools (2011) were used to converge on diachronic processes.

According to both Wenger (1998) and Kress (2010), instances of re/negotiation become part of the chain of meaning making in context. The annotated and highlighted matrix grid of Figure 8 below depicts how critical discourse analysis matrices were overlayed with further annotations about negotiative processes. In this example taken from the second meeting, one teacher (in the right column) overwrote the perspectives of another (in the left column) to re-validate a particular discourse. Overwriting is represented with crossed arrows.

**Figure 8**

*Excerpt from an annotated critical discourse analysis matrix*

The image shows a handwritten table with three columns. The first column contains the text 'enthusiastic-diffusion- silly (evaluation - challenging)' with a double arrow pointing to the second column. The second column contains the text '304 Overwrite (evaluation of committee and diffusion) ... Excited 307 Passing on the passion- mission- policy 311 What it comes down to (policy purpose) 313 Community - vision- standards- passing on the passion - (purpose)'. The third column contains the text '319 Dry stuff 321 Have to do (policy purpose) 322 Overwrite (purpose) ... engaging staff'. There are handwritten notes 'OVERWRITE' in blue ink above the second and third columns. There are also handwritten asterisks and arrows. The text in the second and third columns is highlighted in yellow.

enthusiastic-diffusion- silly (evaluation - challenging)	304 Overwrite (evaluation of committee and diffusion) ... Excited 307 Passing on the passion- mission- policy 311 What it comes down to (policy purpose) 313 Community - vision- standards- passing on the passion - (purpose)	319 Dry stuff 321 Have to do (policy purpose) 322 Overwrite (purpose) ... engaging staff
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### ***Phase five***

The fifth phase involved a holistic focus on broad patterns in the data (Gee, 2011). A holistic focus supports description of patterns in the data for others (Yin, 2011), provoking triangulation across theoretical perspectives (Patton, 2002), and deep consideration of rival explanations (Yin, 2012). In this study, storying implied two different time lenses (Flick, 2007): selective representation of key features and processes within meetings; and representation of qualitative changes over time. The broader aim was to articulate contextualised development and diachronic discursive change (Kress, 2010; Saldana, 2011).

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter has outlined choices of methodology and methods in relation to this study. Choices have been reconciled with epistemological assumptions, the theoretical framework, and the focus of the research questions. Processes for comprising the book club case, and for generating and analysing data have been described. With these foundations, the next chapter represents selective analysis of discursive data emerging from book club interactions.

## CHAPTER FOUR ANALYSIS

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Chapter Four represents the evolving discourses and practices of seven teachers who participated in multiliteracies book club. Vicki, Fiona, Anna, Tash, April, Brooke and Jo (pseudonyms) were all public primary school teachers. Five out of the seven teachers had a specific interest in early childhood education, and all seven had taught literacy across a range of educational settings. A common interest in literacy teaching and learning appeared to be a motivating factor for these teachers' initial participation in the book club.

Each of the three sections in this chapter presents a chronological account. In respective order, the sections relate to literacy, multimodality and communal processes of professional learning. These focuses align with the study's research questions. Chapter Three previously explained how critical discourse analysis (Gee, 2011) and the discourse work of Kress (2010) would be used to highlight meaning making and negotiation during social interactions. Table 11 below depicts the focus of each chapter section.

**Table 11**

*Chapter sections and their relation to the research questions*

Section	Research question
Sharing and expanding notions and practices of literacy	1. How do these teachers' perceptions and knowledge of literacy develop through five book club meetings?
Engaging with multimodality	2. How do these teachers articulate engagement with multimodality through the book club?
Moving towards participatory professional learning and community	3. What are teachers' perceptions of professional learning about literacy in the current context of public primary school education?  4. How can the book club format contribute to the development of a community of practice?

## **Section One: Sharing and Expanding Notions and Practices of Literacy**

This first section of analysis examines how these teachers expressed, negotiated and enacted perspectives and practices of literacy through the five book club meetings. Broadly, in the first book club meeting, traditional print-focused constructions of literacy emerged as significant, although the multiliteracies perspective was also present in two teachers' perspective taking. Analysis of the second meeting reflects the particular ways that Brooke, Vicki, Fiona and Jo responded to overt instruction (The New London Group, 1996, 2000). This revealed an apparent unfamiliarity with multiliteracies' discourse. During subsequent discussion, five teachers critically framed constraints on practices of multiliteracies in schools. Curriculum reform and limited access to technology were identified as particular concerns.

Representing a turning point, the analysis illustrates how four teachers oriented to multiliteracies discourse in the third, fourth and fifth meetings. In response to diverse interests and purposes, teachers increasingly shaped interactions around self-initiated inquiry and resource sharing. This alternated with shorter segments of researcher-led overt instruction. In the fifth meeting, Anna, Vicki and Brooke (the three teachers able to be present), continued to evolve discourses of multiliteracies, and reflected on experiences in the book club. This array of reflections offered complementary and consistent perspectives about the book club experience. Analysis begins by representing interactions of the first meeting.

### **The first meeting (including the initial focus group): Unveiling diverse constructions of literacy**

As previously described in Chapter Three, the first meeting was designed to offer the teachers opportunities to discuss experiences, knowledge, practices and goals, and to explore the multiliteracies perspective (Bull & Anstey, 2010; Cope & Kalantzis, 2013; The New London Group, 1996, 2000). On arrival at the first meeting, each teacher

was greeted with a welcome bag containing small items such as bookmarks, pens, the background questionnaire, and a list of websites of possible interest. After filling out the questionnaire, teachers participated in an ice-breaker activity. Then the researcher guided focus group discussion. After the focus group segment, teachers viewed and discussed two videos about multiliteracies, presented on the room's digital projector. Lastly, teachers explored and discussed one or two postmodern picture books from the book club collection.

During discussion of the focus questions, Anna, Tash, Fiona, Brooke and Vicki expressed contrasting perspectives on literacy. First, Anna and Tash tentatively offered a non-traditional perspective on literacy in response to a focus question: *How would you describe what literacy and literacy teaching are?*

390. **Anna:** I did a um project, at XXXX University [site name deleted], um, on multiliteracies in early childhood, using IT [information technology], and it really changed, not just how I worked with children with IT, but understanding more about multiliteracies? So . . . understanding that, this child who draws a picture is giving you just as much information as this child who's writing a text and um this child is taking photos, and so appreciating that that is children's literacy.

.....  
(a few minutes later in the same discussion)

411. **Anna:** I think for me literacy is about comprehension and expression. So it's not necessarily talking or writing or reading it can be however you are trying to express yourself. Ah I love the idea of the hundred languages? (rising intonation) That Reggio Emilio have? (rising intonation) Um, so I've worked really hard in the last few years to, try and recognise more ways that children can communicate.

412. **Researcher:** Yeah.

413. **April:** Do you use smoke signals much at your school? (soft voice)

414. **Group:** (Soft laughter)

415. **Anna:** We have a couple of kids who would like to. (laughing)

416. **Group:** (More laughter)

417. **Tash:** I mean I think it's also thinking outside the box, because there might be a child whose not very good with the reading and writing but they've got a lot of language there you've just got to draw it out. Um through my training we did some modal . . . mooti, multi . . . (stuttering and looking at Anna)

418. **Anna:** - multiliteracies.

419. **Tash.** Um and one thing was this star wars project that they did and through the enthusiasm these little pre-primary children were writing scripts and setting up um sets and videoing and practicing all those things and that's really important language skills that sometimes we just don't give it what it deserves. So it's really important.

Across these comments, Anna and Tash made connections between literacy and prior tertiary learning around multiliteracies. In doing so, they recognised literacy as an integrated repertoire of diverse communicative and multimodal practices. For instance Anna (390, 411) valued children's orality and visual learning, a position that Tash supported (417, 419). They both made strong connections between students' real world practices of expression and their production of visual and digital text. However, Anna and Tash imbued their perspective taking with a degree of uncertainty (Gee, 2011). For instance Anna (411) repeatedly ended her statements with rising



intonation, while Tash (417) stuttered hesitantly. Meanwhile April (413) seemed to receive Anna's comments with humor. Together, delivery seemed to undermine multiliteracies as an accepted literacy discourse (Gee, 2011; Kress, 2010). The next excerpt illustrates how slightly afterwards in the same discussion, Fiona and Vicki turned conversation towards a traditional footing:

445. **Fiona:** In my time, we've had the First Steps things, where we had the oral continuum, and I loved the way that was set out, the tiny little steps, then we moved into the Curriculum Framework where we had speaking and listening, reading, writing, and viewing, and from that I suddenly see viewing as a big part of how we read? Because we read with the pictures.

446. **Researcher:** Yes?

447. **Fiona:** That's how kids start to read, they read the pictures before they read the words and so on, and now moving into the Australian Curriculum, I think we've got literacy and reading? Oh how does it work?

448. **Anna:** Literacy, literature and . . (short pause)

449. **Fiona:** So breaking it up into that has confused me.

450. **Brooke:** It's confused me too! (laughs)

.....  
(continuing the same discussion)

456. **Vicki:** Um, you want children to be literate in society, you want them to be able to function with print, with computers, whatever they need to use and I've basically done every year level, and I really like the junior primary area, it's maybe not the exact beginning, because they're starting quite early now, with a lot of big writing. But focusing on sounds, sounding out for reading and writing, and helping the children be able to look at you know, 5 words there, and be able to understand what it says, is really important to me. So I really enjoy that.

457. **Anna:** It's satisfying isn't it? Like, you've really taught them something.

In the first part of the above excerpt, Fiona (445) outlined her understanding of literacy by referring to established curriculum frameworks. Contrasting with Anna and Tash's previous comments, Fiona offered a traditional view of literacy, associating literacy teaching with incremental practices. Similarly, Fiona portrayed students' visual meaning making as subordinate to print literacy (Gee, 2011). Dissonance emerged however, when Fiona (449) and Brooke (450) recognised that this traditional framing was not continuous with some

elements of the *Australian Curriculum: English*. Fiona's (449) use of the term 'breaking' was iconic of this discontinuity (Kress, 2010). Rather than interrogating this however, the second part of the above excerpt illustrates how Vicki revalidated traditional literacy (Kress, 2010). In particular, Vicki (456) implied that while teachers may consider students' practices with digital technology important, these can be assimilated into a print-based approach. Supporting this view, Anna (457) equated literacy teaching with print practices. In doing so, she inverted her earlier advocacy of multiliteracies (Gee, 2011; Kress, 2010). Afterwards Anna and Tash revisited tensions between these dual positions while discussing another focus question: *How do you think literacy and primary literacy teaching are being affected by current curriculum changes?*

497. **Anna:** At the moment we're covering so much reading and writing type literacy that I do feel like they're [students] missing out on some other stuff. My goal this year is to work out how to give them [students] all the literacy they need, all the reading and writing, and give them the other stuff.

488. **Group:** Mmmmm

499. **Anna:** Coz I actually value the other stuff, as much as I need the literacy. So um, I'm in a transition phase at the moment.

.....  
(slightly later in the same discussion)

514. **Tash:** See my issue is what are we valuing as the most important? Is reading and writing the most important thing,

515. **Fiona:** Some sugar? (whispering to April)

516. **April:** Excuse me. (whispering and passing the sugar to Fiona)

517. **Tash:** or are children that are problem solvers and are creative, you know to me they're just as important but it's finding that balance.

In the comments above, Anna reported that despite valuing an expanded notion of literacy (497, 499), traditional print had remained the dominant focus for literacy in her classroom. It seems significant that in the second segment, Tash (514, 517) almost immediately questioned how teachers' values, beliefs and purposes are implicated in pedagogies. In doing so, she denaturalised print dominated literacy as the defacto referent for classroom practice (Gee, 2011; Kress, 2010). Additionally, by claiming that creative problem solving is 'just as

important' (517) as reading and writing (514), Tash introduced an important idea: that literacy teaching can be enacted through balanced pedagogical design.

So far, transcripts from the first meeting illustrate how teachers recognised traditional literacy as a dominant and established perspective, although elements of the multiliteracies perspective were also present. Note that expressed aspects of the multiliteracies perspective acknowledged facets of textual rather than sociocultural diversity. One month later, some of these perspectives were negotiated in the second meeting.

### **The second meeting: Considering metalanguage**

As well as exploring teachers' situated practices and understandings, the five book club meetings provided recursive and collaborative opportunities around multiliteracies. In the second meeting, the researcher responded to teachers' previous requests for a metalanguage focus. At the beginning of the meeting, after informal refreshment and conversation, the researcher gave each teacher resource sheets in a string handle paper bag. Later, the researcher facilitated collaborative meaning making about postmodern picture books, aiming to use the resource sheets as conceptual scaffolds. Dialogue below illuminates how some teachers drew on and expanded their situated understandings. While perusing the resource sheets at the beginning of this activity, Brooke voiced some uncertainties:

619. **Brooke:** I looked on that [scaffold sheet] and the language was just . .

620. **Researcher:** Yeah

621. **Brooke:** foreign?

Brooke's comments in this excerpt (619, 621) suggest her unfamiliarity and perhaps even unease with multiliteracies discourse. As the activity progressed, three other teachers' practices also suggested unfamiliarity with multiliteracies metalanguage. The following excerpt conveys how Jo, Fiona and Vicki initially relied on

simple terminology, while collaboratively exploring the postmodern picture book *The Way Cats Work* by Alan Snow (2009). The second part of the excerpt reveals that these same teachers shifted to simple use of multiliteracies terms when using the resource sheets. To highlight this shift, the extract below appears in a before-and-after format:

705. **Jo:** Cartoon, even the way it's set out is a cartoon.  
 706. **Fiona:** Mmmm  
 707. **Jo:** The way it's laid out, cartoon.  
 708. **Vicki:** There's information in the pictures. (Pointing to a page)  
 709. **Jo:** I have no idea what the book's about, I'm just looking at that one page. . (medium pause) . . There's a lot of comedy used in it.
- .....  
 (after accessing the resource sheets)
740. **Jo:** Action you could look at. Camera angle you could look at.  
 741. **Fiona:** [inaudible] looks like it's from inside.  
 742. **Jo:** Yeah.  
 743. **Fiona:** And then you've got the outside.  
 744. **Vicki:** And from the cat looking at that.  
 745. **Fiona:** The cat's viewpoint

The first part of the above transcript illustrates how Jo, Fiona and Vicki relied on simple terminology, using the terms 'cartoon' (705, 707), 'pictures' (708) and 'comedy' (709). Metalanguage began to appear in the second segment, when the same teachers used the resource sheets to identify authorial designs such as camera angle (740) and viewpoint (745). The timing of teachers' interaction with the resource sheets was recorded in observational notes. As well as beginning to use metalanguage, these teachers intensified shared attentional focus as they co-constructed meaning. Gee (2011) explains how consecutive utterances indicate joint focus when connectives such as 'and' are used (743, 744), and when the subject of attention is repeated (744, 745). Overall, before-and-after snapshots reveal qualitatively different processes and content of meaning making.

Not long after this activity, five teachers began to critically frame practices for multiliteracies in schools. The following interchange between Fiona and Vicki represents some of this discussion:

1101. **Fiona:** Is this [approach] going to take more time away from those [reading and writing], while we get them [students] to figure all this out? Or is it just-
1102. **Vicki:** But this [multiliteracies approach] is using reading and writing in different ways. This is using-
1103. **Fiona:** (Clears her throat assertively) I just think, it's just about the, you could spend one whole lesson on just that page, that we had there today [activity with picture books].
1104. **Vicki:** Hmmm
1105. **Fiona:** I just wonder where all that other stuff fits in. I know we still have to do it, but what do we give up to be able to gain that time?
1106. **Researcher:** Yeah, so you're feeling?
1107. **Fiona:** I'm feeling, I'm just feeling the curriculum, the new curriculum is going to dictate so much.

In the above extract, Fiona (1101, 1105) signified a hierarchy between traditional and multiliteracies discourses (Gee, 2011; Kress, 2010), which she contextualised in curriculum reform (1107). Fiona (1107) specifically suggested that this prioritisation was due to prescriptions in the *Australian Curriculum: English*. While no teacher offered a response to this perception at this particular time, the group went on to consider further constraints on literacy practice. For instance, Tash, Jo and Fiona problematised resourcing of public primary schools:

1113. **Tash:** What do we need in [public] schools to be able to do this? [multiliteracies approach]
1114. **Group:** Mmmmh
1115. **Jo:** Well, yeah. Access to computers that we don't have. That's the, that's the problem.
1116. **Anna:** Mmmmm
1117. **Jo:** You know they're saying [policy makers] that we're [teachers] meant to do all of this, but if you haven't, like I get one computer period a week, we don't use smartboards or anything like that.
1118. **Fiona:** (Slightly sarcastic) Kids can learn to read and write without the computer  
{[inaudible segment]}.
1119. **Jo:** {No but if you bring it back to multimodal.

In the interchange above, Jo (1115-1119) argued that lack of access to technology, and its physical separation from classroom learning, had constrained literacy practices in public school classrooms. By marking this as a wider contextual issue, Jo (1117) foregrounded how

institutionalised practices may reinforce traditional literacy approaches at the classroom level (Gee, 2011).

Analysis of the second meeting has shown that four teachers appeared to be unfamiliar with multiliteracies metalanguage. While Vicki, Fiona and Jo initially relied on simple meaning making strategies with postmodern picture books, changes in their metalanguage were associated with overt instruction (The New London Group, 1996, 2000), and dialogic and conceptual scaffolding (Cumming-Potvin, Baillie & Bowden, 2013; Green, 2005). Following overt instruction, five teachers engaged in critical framing, as they considered constraints on the development of literacy practices. For instance, Fiona voiced concern that curriculum reforms had dictated narrow traditional pedagogies. Jo on the other hand, asserted that established physical arrangements in her school had limited her digital practices. In the third meeting one month later, teachers continued to negotiate meaning, and peer-led scaffolding became significant.

### **The third meeting: Emerging co-participation in multiliteracies**

In response to the group's feedback, the third meeting focused on planning and assessment practices. Emergently, teachers shaped turn taking, pace and content. The researcher considered this change to be a turning point in teachers' participation. The following description sets the scene for these developments.

The third meeting began with informal refreshments and extended social conversation. As conversation ebbed, the researcher showed video footage of Geoff Bull and Michelle Anstey speaking about multiliteracies practice (Victorian Department of Education, n.d.). Semi-structured discussion flowed into open ended group conversation, where Anna spontaneously presented a picture book sourced from her classroom. April also presented a self-sourced resource. As open ended discussion swelled and faded, the researcher invited teachers to respond to rotating message prompts. After discussion, the teachers

viewed and critiqued examples of multiliteracies planning from the researcher's classroom. Additionally, the researcher invited the group to explore a digital version of a fairy tale, and to design of a hypothetical sequence of classroom learning.

A hint of one teacher's changed participation in multiliteracies surfaced at the beginning of the meeting, when Vicki enthusiastically reported her first classroom experimentation with strategies from the book club:

17. **Vicki:** and I *actually* (speech emphasis) went out to our interactive whiteboard, just outside my room and I haven't used it. I've let *prac* (speech emphasis) students use it? (rising intonation)
18. **Researcher:** Yep, yep.
19. **Vicki:** Coz they [students] all go off to the computer lab.
20. **Researcher:** Yep.
21. **Vicki:** I haven't used it at all [the IWB]. I thought (claps) before I see you this week (laughs and sounds excited)
22. **Researcher:** Ooooh
23. **Vicki:** (speaking rapidly) And because of the Olympic games, I've gotta get out there and turn the thing on. I wasn't even sure how to turn it on. It's been there for over a year. And I thought right, I have to do this, I have to. And we [teacher and students] looked at the page that, that=
24. **Researcher:** =Oh=
25. **Vicki:** you [the researcher] brought up. And you were talking about what's on there, not just about the athletes but, 'What's there? What's this doing? What is the Australia Post sign all about and' (role playing voice) and you know bla bla bla.
26. **Researcher:** Oh, that's great.

In the above recount, Vicki reported two new pedagogical practices: her first use of an interactive whiteboard (21, 23), and facilitation of student meaning making in the visual mode (25). Vicki explicitly attributed these new practices to her participation in the book club, an association she highlighted (25) by role-playing book club discourse (Gee, 2011). Later in the meeting, Anna also articulated multiliteracies focuses, while spontaneously presenting a text sourced from her classroom, *Color Me Happy* by Cort and Roddie (2010):

456. **Anna:** This is a book I've been using for the last three years. And I use it to introduce to children the idea that um, colour can um, be used to represent emotions and things like this. So it's about feelings. And it starts off, when she's very angry, lots of reds and oranges and yellows? And all the outlines are reds, and you know there's big picture text. And um, and then, as she sort of calms herself down, she calms herself down and the colours start to calm down as well and changing to the blues and greens. And then as she gets happier they change to yellow? and so, we do a lot of work on this with my class. Where the kids will start using colours, to represent different emotions and um, you know, thinking about the way they're using those sort of things in their artwork.

In the above presentation, Anna admits she has used this text in her classroom for some time. However, initiating peer-led rather than researcher facilitated overt instruction, Anna expressed understandings of simple visual schema. For instance, she described colour and character expression as significant aspects of visual design. A few minutes later, a further example of peer-led overt instruction emerged: April modeled how the *Story Kit* (Apple, 2012) iPad application can be used to author original multimodal texts. This application was to become significant to Vicki's practices over subsequent months (reported in a later section of analysis).

Analysis of the third meeting features how Vicki and Anna began to share and model expanding literacy practices and understandings. Vicki reported that her experimentations had developed in response to book club participation. A new pattern of peer-led interaction emerged, which continued to feature in the fourth meeting.

#### **The fourth meeting: Peer-led practices with digital texts**

One month later, in the fourth meeting, teacher-initiated interaction became more prevalent. Over the whole of this meeting, conversation oscillated between reflections on situated practice, ongoing segments of researcher-led overt instruction, and teachers' sharing and demonstrations of digital texts. Short segments of critical framing were also present, as teachers offered each other feedback about emerging practices and understandings.



This meeting took place at the second venue. Although the electrical supply failed unexpectedly in the first few minutes (due to a faulty urn), teachers voted to continue until sunset. In now customary style, the meeting began with social conversation over refreshments. As the group seated themselves in a ring of fold-up chairs, they spontaneously modelled and discussed resources and practices. Highlighting Vicki's ongoing engagement with the Story Kit (Apple, 2012) iPad application, the following extract is drawn from a sequence later in the meeting. This application had been introduced by April in the third meeting. Brooke had missed the third meeting, so Vicki addressed her directly while the rest of the group moved in close around Vicki's iPad. The second part of the excerpt illustrates how Tash offered feedback on Vicki's ideas:

713. **Vicki:** This is the story kit.  
 714. **Brooke:** So 'story kit'  
 715. **Vicki:** You go to, I put them, well I put the photos on. But you just go to edit. So say for example, you go there= (pointing)  
 716. **Tash:** =yeah=  
 717. **Vicki:** =and then you, and record (operating the application)  
 718. **????:** Yeah  
 719. **Brooke:** Pretty nifty  
 720. **Vicki:** 'Lily and the vacuum cleaner' (role plays recording onto her ipad) . . and then just go back to edit . . . (the ipad replays 'Lily and the vacuum cleaner').  
 721. **Brooke:** Ha ha ha ha (laughing)  
 .....  
 726. **Tash:** So imagine that. You start that, what year have you got?  
 727. **Vicki:** One  
 728. **Tash:** Year one. So you've started that with year one, where you've scaffolded it, by providing the pictures on there=  
 729. **Vicki:** = Mmmh  
 730. **Tash:** Then as you go through the years, it becomes more sophisticated=  
 731. **Vicki:** = Mmmh=  
 732. **Tash:** but it comes to the stage where they can start adding the {pictures for themselves.  
 733. **Brooke:** {themselves. Mmmm

During this example of peer-led overt instruction, Vicki (715, 717, 720) used procedural language to model a multimodal iPad application. Although Vicki did not use explicit metalanguage, her engagement with this digital media suggests appropriation of book club discourse (Kress,

2010). In the second part of the excerpt, Tash framed Vicki's practices through the lens of her emerging understandings, signifying the importance of learner choice and recursive knowledge building (732). The next excerpt illustrates how Tash gave Vicki further feedback:

780. **Tash:** (enthusiastically) See you could redo that again [story making with the ipad application], and talk about what worked well and what didn't=

781. **Vicki:** =Yeah=

782. **Tash:** =and maybe talk about the fact that if they [students] use the same model, and just keep moving it so it actually looked exactly the same the whole way through?

In this instance, Tash (781, 782) supported Vicki's experimentations while casting teachers and students as co-participants in recursive learning. This is again indicative of a multiliteracies perspective, and tacit valuing of social learning (Wenger, 1998).

Analysis of the fourth meeting has illustrated teachers' participation in overt instruction, critical framing and co-construction. In particular this evidenced expanding understandings. Further developments appeared in the fifth (and final) meeting, which focused on teachers' reflections about the book club experience.

#### **The fifth meeting (including final focus group): Teachers' reflections about literacy learning in the book club**

The final meeting, like those before, began with open ended social conversation over refreshments. Teachers' talk gradually segued to a round-robin of resource sharing, where iPad applications were a feature (discussed in later analysis). After this peer-driven discussion, the researcher asked Vicki, Anna and Brooke to draw an individual storymap about their perceptions of the book club: *What stood out for you, and what kind of things do you remember that really meant something to you?* Teachers' subsequent storymap descriptions related to different but complementary aspects of the book club. Part of Anna's storymap description is presented below, because it focused on the topic of literacy. Anna's full poster can be viewed in **Appendix K**.

1289. **Anna:** I wrote that in week one, the things I really enjoyed were talking about new ideas, and beginning to make those connections to your prior knowledge and to what you were doing in the classroom?
1290. **Vicki:** Yeah.
1291. **Anna:** Um, and I really felt like I came out of it appreciating all the diverse ideas and experiences.
1292. **Vicki:** Mmmm
1293. **Anna:** And then in week two, because I was thinking 'I'm not sure how this is going to be for early childhood', but we were looking at the picture books?
1294. **Vicki:** Hmmm
1295. **Anna:** and um thinking about picture books in a different way?
1296. **Vicki:** Hmmm, mmmm
1297. **Anna:** I thought was fantastic. And then, um thinking about the different ways, you had those tables that authors could portray information, you know colours and depth and um all that sort of stuff. And I thought they were fantastic. And also we looked at some great websites. And then in week three, I think that was the week for us sharing technology ideas? and we had that fantastic planning format? Coz I love an open ended planning format? And I felt like that was really open ended. And it followed my brain pattern, so (laughing voice) it's probly the way for me.
1298. **Group:** Laughter.
1299. **Anna:** And it really made me think about how to extend children. I think we get stuck in a rut. This is what a child can do?

During storymap description, Anna made connections between collaborative inquiry in the multiliteracies book club and her evolving perspectives on literacy. She tacitly alluded to multiliteracies knowledge processes: situated practice (1289, 1291), overt instruction (1293, 1295, 1297), and critical framing (1297, 1299). Throughout, Anna intersected book club focuses with situated classroom needs and interests. Anna revisited these perceptions later in the meeting, during discussion of a focus question: *How would you describe literacy and literacy teaching now that you've experienced book club?*

1570. **Anna:** I think it's [the book club experience] um, I think it's about broadening your horizons. I think it's.
1571. **Researcher:** Yeah.
1572. **Anna:** You know, putting more thought into, what you're doing with a text and what text you're choosing and types of text.
1573. **Group:** Mmmm
1574. **Anna:** You know, we get very stuck in, like I'm doing this theme and these are the books that I've got. Whereas I think it's [the book club] making me think about different texts, and studying a text for itself sake, not making it fit into a theme or something.

In this reflection, Anna acknowledged her newly developing awareness of textual diversity and pedagogy for multiliteracies. In caveat, such awareness continued to privilege textual rather than sociocultural aspects of diversity and communication.

### **Summary of findings for the first section**

This first section of analysis has demonstrated beginning shifts in teachers' perspectives, discourses and participation over the five book club meetings. Initially, constructions of literacy reflected both traditional and multiliteracies perspectives, although traditional constructions of literacy were given priority. Later, Tash questioned this positioning of literacy, while Fiona claimed that policy reforms had reinforced print-based practices in classrooms. In subsequent meetings, the group collaboratively explored and discussed a broadening range of text types, resources and practices. Discursive changes emerged as teachers participated in multiliteracies knowledge processes and discursive negotiation (Gee, 2011; Kress, 2010). Gradual movement from researcher-led to peer-led scaffolding was significant. A summary of the main findings of this section is provided below in Table 12. These findings parallel and complement the next section, which analyses teachers' engagement with multimodality.

**Table 12**

*Main findings of the first section of analysis*

- 
- Teachers initially constructed literacy in diverse ways, although traditional print focused constructions were dominant.
  - Understandings, perspectives and practices were broadened and negotiated during ongoing researcher and peer-scaffolded experiences.
  - Four teachers demonstrated increasing orientation to multiliteracies notions and discourse.
- 

## **Section Two: Engaging with Multimodality**

In this second section, the book club cycle is revisited. This time the focus is on how teachers engaged with and constructed understandings about multimodality across the five meetings. In general, data revealed that the topic of multimodality was largely absent from teachers' initial discourse. Two teachers alluded to challenges in previous learning about the concept. As the group participated in collaborative book club experiences in consecutive meetings, meaning making and interest in multimodal and digital texts emerged. These developments are particularly showcased through Vicki's reports of interest-driven experimentation with multimodal texts in her classroom.

### **The first meeting: Initial perspectives on multimodality**

As described in the first section of this chapter, the initial meeting offered teachers broad opportunities to discuss perspectives and understandings of literacy and professional learning. Within these discussions, teachers only touched on the topic of multimodality a few times. The first instance emerged at the very beginning of the meeting. After welcoming the teachers to the book club and sharing refreshments, the researcher prompted an icebreaker activity: *Draw what multimodality means to you*. Some teachers seemed uneasy about this activity, a situation they negotiated with humor:

59. **Fiona:** (as she begins to draw) Multimodal goes into IT stuff for me and that scares me.  
 (Long pause . . . tapping of chalk pastels and giggling)  
 60. **Tash:** What were we doing again? (whispering to Anna)  
 61. **Anna:** (Giggling)  
 62. **Fiona:** (Looking at Vicki's drawing of a computer) A washing machine?  
 63. **Vicki:** (laughs loudly)  
 64. **Fiona:** Well you need to learn how to use it.  
 65. **Vicki:** That could be helpful.  
 66. **Brooke:** Oh . . (short pause) I'm such a bad drawer (quietly as if to herself).  
 67. **Fiona:** That's why you use computers.

Although Fiona (59) used the term multimodal, she seemed to negatively associate it with technology (59). Brooke (66) also seemed uneasy during this activity, although perhaps about the act of drawing. Throughout the sequence, Fiona (62, 64, 67) used gentle humor to ameliorate these low-level anxieties. Although these interchanges cannot be interpreted definitively, they suggest that Fiona and Brooke experienced discomfort with the icebreaker's focus on non-print based communication.

The topic of multimodality did not re-emerge until later discussion of a focus question: *How do you think literacy and primary literacy teaching are being affected by current curriculum changes?* In a short comment, Vicki suggested that teachers' existing access to professional learning about multimodality was limited:

536. **Vicki:** Yeah I, yeah I thought when we had someone, of our English specialists, talk to us about the new curriculum and *talk* about multimodal text (speech emphasis), and, not you know no-one knowing much about it, is this something new is this something different? Or is this just what we are doing as well. That's what I'd like to know.

In the comment above, Vicki alluded to generalised professional uncertainty about multimodality. While Vicki suggested that her professional learning had not enabled her to understand the meaning of multimodality, she also implied that teachers wanted to gain this understanding.

In a third reference to multimodality, at the end of the meeting, Tash commented on challenges she had experienced while previously trying to develop her understandings. As Tash leafed through a professional learning text by Maureen Walsh (2011), which had been placed on the table for teachers to borrow, she made the following comment:

850. **Tash:** Coz I have XXXX [university lecturer's name deleted] one [book] from when I did it [tertiary retraining for early childhood education]. It [XXXX's book] completely did my head in. I got more confused.

In this reflection, Tash claimed that her participation in formal university retraining had not assisted her in understanding multimodality, and marked conceptual inaccessibility of the textbook as a major challenge. While this situation remains opaque in terms of analysis, it may be significant that Brooke (854) immediately interpreted Tash's remark in a particular way, by requesting that the researcher help the group access 'really user-friendly' resources in the next meeting.

Analysis of the first meeting suggests that although at least two teachers had previously sought information about multimodality, they felt their inquiries had remained unsuccessful. These teachers identified access to the discourse in both school and university settings as a particular challenge. The next book club meeting included discussion of further constraints.

### **The second meeting: Considering contextual constraints on multimodal practice**

One month later, the researcher responded to teacher requests by scaffolding multiliteracies metalanguage. One of the first activities involved group discussion of a quote from Anstey and Bull (2009):

*There is an important difference between simply using a mode, and consciously understanding its elements and how it works to make meaning. Conscious competence is far more useful as it can be applied, transferred, transformed and added to. Conscious competence is the goal of the multiliterate classroom.*

(p. 4)

This quote prompted lengthy discussion, during which Anna and Tash offered their perception of limited multimodal learning in classrooms:

522. **Tash:** You [researcher] talk about memem, memulti, (stuttering) multimodal, this sort of stuff, and you [teachers] kind of get bogged down with the specifics of what's in the um, given in the national curriculum.

523. **Anna:** Yeah there's such a strong focus on reading and writing. There even seems to be less of a focus on the oral language, which we [teachers] feel is really important.

524. **Group:** Mmmm

525. **Anna:** But um you know there's no sort of goals about creativity.

In the excerpt above, Tash and Anna critically framed how the *Australian Curriculum: English* prescribes narrow print-focused literacy pedagogy. They also positioned teachers as policy implementers, rather than as facilitators and designers of learning. It is noteworthy that these early childhood teachers framed their practice in alignment with the recently mandated *Australian Curriculum: English* rather than the *Early Years Learning Framework*, which encourages diverse ways of knowing the world in the early childhood setting.

Consistent with previous analysis, data from the second meeting indicates how Anna and Tash perceived traditional literacy discourse as a curriculum priority, which in turn influenced their pedagogies. Analysis of the third meeting demonstrates how the group moved beyond this traditional discourse to construct understandings about multimodality.

### **The third meeting: Scaffolded encounters with digital text**

In the third meeting, the researcher facilitated a focus on classroom planning. The following excerpt represents how Tash positioned the use of technology in her classroom:



513. **Tash:** See I use a lot of um games on the IWB, specially literacy sound games and things like that? (rising intonation) I find that's very motivating for a lot of my boys who would never go to the writing table, or a game with sounds on the table. But you give them *Poop Deck Pirates*

514. **Vicki:** Oh yeah when you've got-

515. **Tash:** and it's not real words and the kids have to click if it's rubbish or real. And they *love* (speech emphasis) playing that game. Whereas, if I've got this same cardboard game pphhfft, they'd be the last kids to go there.

516. **Vicki:** Yeah

517. **Tash:** So I think, the use of literacy, like technologies like that, ah motivate children that normally wouldn't be into reading and writing? (rising intonation)

.....  
(a few minutes later)

558. **Tash:** I think it's (IT) a motivational tool for a lot of kids=

559. **Vicki:** = mmm=

560. **Tash:** Like your reluctant writers=

561. **Vicki:** =yeah=

562. **Tash:** = *why would I want to write on a piece of paper?* (role playing reluctant student). *But if you gave me an iPad and said let's make a story* (roleplaying), they would be like, *OK, no worries* (roleplaying excited student). Coz it's just different media.

Across these comments, Tash denoted her conception of information technology as a motivational tool for student literacy engagement. More particularly, Tash associated information technology with print literacy outcomes (513, 560, 562). In doing so, Tash voiced traditional literacy purposes. This instrumentalism conflicted with her earlier valuing of multiliteracies (see the first section of analysis). However later in the meeting, Anna broadened the group's view of technology, during an activity that involved teachers in writing on a small collection of prompt sheets. One prompt began with the question: *Successful multimodal learning might be about?* Anna's comments were initiated by an inquiry from April:

677. **April:** You know when you [the researcher] were saying about multimodal learning? I'm just interested to know. Multimodal, ah when I first came here I thought it was to do primarily with technology? But it's not is it? That's just one aspect of multimodal.
678. **Researcher:** Aaaah.
679. **April:** Is it right or not?
680. **Researcher:** What would other people say to that?
681. **Anna:** I think it doesn't have to be technology. Um, I think a picture book can be multimodal. And an advertisement catalogue is multimodal.
682. **Group:** Mmmmh.
683. **Anna:** So I think multimodal, technology gives you a very good resource you know using lots of modes at the same time. But I think most things, that you're exposed to, with reading and pictures and that sort of stuff, has multimodality nowadays.
684. **Researcher:** Yeah, yeah.
685. **April:** So it is almost integrated across the curriculum anyway, regardless of technology's influence.

In this instance Anna (681, 683) scaffolded April (677, 679, 685) to extend her understandings. The above excerpt demonstrates how the group was beginning to negotiate deeper understandings of the way multimodality is implicated in a wide range of texts and meaning making practices.

Analysis of the third meeting has demonstrated how April and Anna scaffolded the group in understandings about multimodality. This expanded the way pedagogy around digital text was conceptualised. Collaborative negotiation of multimodality extended into the fourth meeting.

### **The fourth meeting: Co-participating in multimodal media**

In the fourth meeting, conversation oscillated seamlessly between teachers' reflections on situated practice, ongoing researcher-led overt instruction, and teacher sharing and modeling. Short segments of critical framing were also apparent when teachers offered each other feedback and support. In particular, Vicki began to demonstrate increasing awareness of multimodality. For instance early in the meeting, Vicki reported how she had responded to students' understandings about the visual mode:

260. **Vicki:** Well my show and tell relies on power (smiling).  
261. **Jo:** You're a good girl (laughing).  
262. **Researcher:** Mmmm, now we're intrigued.  
263. **Vicki:** Here I am the non-techno person.  
264. **Researcher:** Oh that's great.  
265. **Jo:** Ho ho ho (laughing)  
266. **Vicki:** We've [Vicki and her students] been talking about the Olympics, talking about movement and then I was doing a sort of T and E thing [Technology and Enterprise] about how cartoons and pictures are made, coz you know, they [students] came out with '*Oh no it's just a drawing and they move the picture*'. So we got a drawing and moved it. And I said well does that look like a cartoon on TV?  
268. **Jo:** Laughing.  
269. **Vicki:** So then we made a flipbook.

In this recount, Vicki described and role-played how she oriented students in her classroom to textual designs in the visual mode. In this way, Vicki alluded to new decision-making about pedagogical practices with multimodality. Vicki, Anna and Brooke demonstrated ongoing orientation to multimodal texts in the fifth and final meeting.

### **The fifth meeting: Social learning with multimodal texts**

Evidence of shifting discourses continued to appear in the fifth meeting. Below, a series of transcripts demonstrate how Anna, Vicki and Brooke continued to co-construct multimodal practices with digital texts. In the first example, Anna scaffolded group understandings about multimodality, while sharing the digital narrative *Meet Millie* (Megapops LLC, 2011, 2012). Anna started by loading the application onto her iPad and handing it to the group for their exploration:

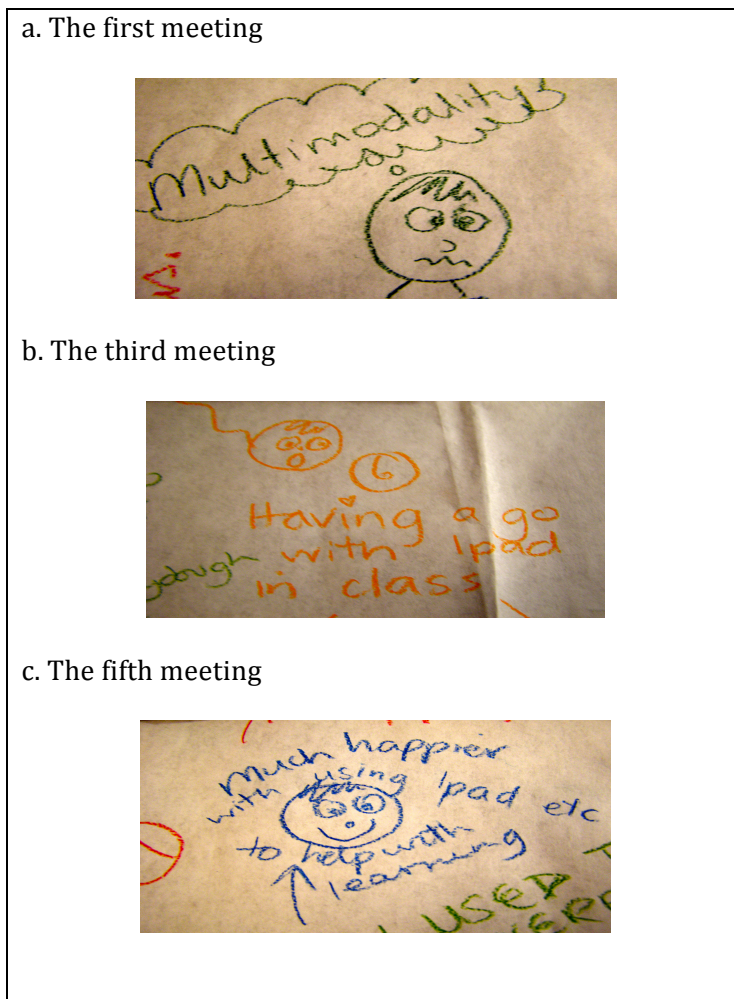
712. **Anna:** Start from the beginning.  
 713. **Vicki:** Start from the beginning.  
 714. **Brooke:** Oh, a little cat, is it?  
 715. **Anna:** It's a dog.  
 716. **Brooke:** Oh it's a dog. Can't see it.  
 717. **Anna:** So get it [the ipad app] to read it to you.  
 718. **Vicki:** (Begins to press icons and the app makes a harp noise).  
     Meet Millie, a sticker on every page. (Vicki reads the  
     screen)  
 719. **Anna:** And the kids know how to do this without me telling them.  
     (The narrator begins '*Once every million billion trillion*  
     *years*')  
 720. **Vicki:** Mmmm  
 721. **Brooke:** You can't compare to this. It's so exciting.  
 722. **Vicki:** Now if I move that, coz kids would. (exploring icons in the  
     text)  
 723. **Anna:** Yep, so move that across.  
 724. **Vicki:** Slide it. (uses slider icon, making a zipper noise)  
 725. **Brooke:** Oooooooooo (sounding like a siren)  
 726. **Anna:** It turns into like a little pop up book.  
 727. **Vicki:** Oh wow! Very multimodal. (excited voice)

As Anna scaffolded a joint focus on *Meet Millie*, Vicki and Brooke mirrored her actions and subject focus. Operational discourse featured throughout (Gee, 2011; Kress, 2010), while the three teachers also attended to visual (714, 715, 716), print (718), spatial (726), and audio (724) elements. Further, Anna (719) and Vicki (722) acknowledged situated practice as an important influence on interactions with the text. Together, these actions represented ongoing negotiation of multiliteracies practices and an increasingly spontaneous joint focus.

After further peer-driven discussion, the researcher asked Vicki, Anna and Brooke to draw a storymap to describe their experiences in the book club. Figure 9 depicts selective parts of Vicki's drawn storymap, which she pointed to as she spoke.

**Figure 9**

Excerpts from Vicki's storymap



This segment of analysis draws on a multimodal approach (Kress, 2010; Kress & van Leeuwin, 2001) to integrate Vicki's spoken, gestural, print and visual text. Vicki's spoken text appears below:

1209. **Vicki:** My face went from that to . . . (Vicki points in order to three parts of her drawing, and mimics the changing expressions drawn there).

1210. **Group:** Laughter

1211. **Anna:** That's a grumpy face (happy voice - pointing to the first image).

1212. **Vicki:** So that was yeah, 'What is this?' (role playing her own puzzlement)

1213. **Anna:** Oh that's cute. (Smiling)

As a whole, Vicki represented changing perceptions and perspectives about multimodality across the beginning, middle and end of the book club. At first, Vicki drew herself with a puzzled face, which seemed to

gaze directly at the teachers viewing her storymap (a). By placing the word multimodality in a thought bubble and role-playing a puzzled face while she pointed to this image in real time, Vicki implied that she was confused about the meaning of multimodality around the time of the first book club meeting. In the next image (b) Vicki drew herself facing her students in the classroom. In this image Vicki labeled herself as 'having a go' at new literacy practices using iPad technology, a situation she also role-played in real time. In this way, Vicki signified translation of book club practices into her classroom. In the third image (c), Vicki depicted herself with a happy face gazing directly at the teachers viewing her storymap, an expression she also role-played in real time. The written annotation 'much happier with using iPads to help with learning' alluded to Vicki's satisfaction with these developments. As a whole, Vicki's storymap description conveyed her recognition and satisfaction with developing skills and understandings, which she perceived as flowing between the book club and her classroom practice.

### **Summary of findings for the second section**

The second section of analysis has illustrated how teachers' perspectives and practices evolved through five book club meetings. In the first meeting, the topic of multimodality was not addressed many times. However, when the topic did arise, it provoked varying responses. For instance, Fiona said she found multimodality 'scary'. On the other hand, Vicki believed that teachers in schools knew little about multimodality, while Tash remarked that her university experiences with the concept had 'done her head in'. As teachers participated in scaffolded experiences with a wide range of texts and resources, some began to critique traditional print-focused approaches. Gradually, five of the teachers broadened their understandings, and began to orient towards digital multimodal texts. Vicki in particular associated book club experiences with her exploration of new multimodal practices in the classroom. These findings are summarised below in Table 13. The

third and final section of analysis follows, examining how teachers perceived and participated in professional learning.

**Table 13**

*Main findings of the second section of analysis*

- 
- Two teachers claimed that multimodality was neither a well known nor an accessible construct.
  - The group engaged in scaffolded practices with multimodal text, and considered wider constraints on the development of multimodal practices.
  - Five teachers gradually orientated towards multimodal digital texts.
- 

### **Section Three: Moving towards Participatory Professional Learning and Community**

The third section turns to teachers' professional learning, and like prior sections, follows the sequence of five book club meetings. It begins by illustrating how Fiona, Vicki and Brooke initially identified experiences of transmissive professional learning in their schooling contexts. As analysis progresses, it demonstrates how Vicki, Anna, Tash and Brooke gradually positioned themselves as collaborative participatory learners in the book club. Sometimes, as in the case of Tash, this collaboration assisted negotiation of challenges experienced outside the book club context. Analysis of the final meeting points to how Brooke, Anna and Vicki identified supportive and social aspects of the book club as important to their ongoing involvement. These patterns parallel previous analysis in this chapter, which demonstrated how teachers negotiated and scaffolded each other in meaning making practices involving multiliteracies.

#### **The first meeting: Voicing prior experiences of transmissive professional learning**

As mentioned in previous sections, the first book club meeting was semi-structured. Some discussion related to teachers' perspectives on professional learning in the current Australian context of public

primary schooling. The following excerpt presents Fiona, Brooke and Vicki's responses to the question: *If you could describe your past professional learning experiences using your own words, how would you describe what you have experienced?*

215. **Fiona:** I think when you go to a PD you have an idea of what you are going to get out of it? and often it's quite disappointing? (rising intonation)

216. **Group:** (chorus) Yeah, yeah.

217. **Fiona:** You get there, and you've got those questions, that you think OK, I'm gonna make sure that when I leave I've got this this and this, and some presenters? (rising intonation) start with that, 'what do you want to get out of this?' and try to cover that by the end. But a lot of them over time, you haven't got what you want out of it.

.....  
(a few minutes later)

251. **Brooke:** And just no flexibility on where we moved the table, like we wanted to move and sit as a group, and they said, 'No you have to move back this way' and then another person who was involved said, 'Yes you can move it back', so we were like this, then this, then this.

252. **Group:** Uggh

253. **Brooke:** So yeah. And the content, it was like, 'Where is the content? I want more' (sounding frustrated). So in the end we were on our laptops, and we were actually going on the internet (laughing).

.....  
(a few seconds later)

259. **Vicki:** And with our one [event] it was just, it was giving us an introduction to the national curriculum, so there were four, there was an overall beginning part and then there were four different areas. But all of it was so repetitious,

260. **Researcher:** Yep.

261. **Vicki:** =and we'd [school staff] already done quite a bit of that anyway,

262. **Group:** Mmmmh

263. **Vicki:** not that they [presenters] knew that but, it just, you yawned.

264. **Ronnie:** Yeah

266. **Anna:** I went to a national curriculum PD yeah.

267. **Group:** Laughter

268. **Fiona:** Well I think there was over 350 staff or something at that particular one.

Across the above discussion, Fiona, Brooke and Vicki voiced the perception that institutionally organised professional learning is often generic, and does not address diverse needs or purposes. Fiona (215, 217) repeatedly used rising intonation, perhaps seeking confirmation of



her perspective from other members of the group. Confirmation emerged a few minutes later, when Brooke and Vicki expressed similar concerns. In the second part of the above excerpt, Brooke (251, 253) alluded to how teachers are physically controlled during large workshops, and expressed her disappointment with generic content. Vicki (259, 263) reiterated her experience of didactic professional learning during system-wide roll out of the new national curriculum. Like Fiona and Brooke, Vicki (263) perceived organised professional learning as unresponsive to teachers' learning needs. In common, Fiona, Brooke and Vicki characterised teachers' disenchantment with these practices. However, Anna went on to add some positive remarks about her experience of workshops:

283. **Anna:** I've had some really good PD over the last couple of years. It seems to be being offered now where you go to three or four or more sessions, with time in between, to think about what you've done and apply it=

284. **Researcher:** =Yep=

285. **Anna:** =and get feedback and then come back and it's constantly getting that feedback and then being able to apply it.

Anna (283, 285) valued workshop formats if the content could be integrated into the teaching and learning cycle. At the same time, she still objectified professional knowledge as something 'offered' to teachers by external agencies. So while Fiona, Brooke and Vicki characterised professional learning as transmissive and generic, Anna signaled that more integrative and sustained versions were also present in the milieu.

Discussions in the first meeting highlighted how teachers had experienced diverse formats of professional learning during their involvement in Australian public schooling. Overall however, transmissive processes of professional learning were predominant, and seemed to align with policy imperatives. Teachers returned to the topic of professional learning in the second meeting.

### **The second meeting: Exploring participatory professional learning**

After informal conversation and refreshments at the beginning of the second meeting, the researcher presented a quote from Anstey and Bull (2009). In response, Fiona made the following remarks:

490. **Fiona:** I don't know how it works, you know those sorts of things, but then I think that when I was at school anyway, we were just taught formulas for maths and those sorts of things,

491. **Brooke:** Mmmm, steps.

492. **Fiona:** and it's taken me years to, well, many years, to figure out why all of that happened? (rising intonation)

While teachers' biographies were not explored in this study, Fiona signposted how experience had shaped her identity as a learner, and her notions of literacy. As the group participated in consequent meetings, teachers began to consider professional positioning.

### **The third meeting: Repositioning inquiry**

One month later in the third meeting, teachers began to articulate shifts in their learning process. During these articulations, they tacitly recognised each other as participants in shared repertoires. Several times, this emerged while teachers mused on experimentation with multiliteracies practices in classrooms. For instance, Tash reported that her experimentations with multiliteracies did not sit well with literacy approaches in her school. The next extract illustrates how Tash used discussion opportunities to explore this dilemma:

449. **Tash:** I'm in the sort of situation where one of the teachers at my same level is very much about structured sit down, whereas I'm not, so. And I'm in school where we're doing literacy blocks and 'XXXX' (phonics program name deleted), so it's tryin to do what I'm been told to do at an administration level, but also fitting in with my own philosophy as well.

This excerpt illustrates how Tash framed her ongoing pedagogical development in a school context dominated by traditional literacy approaches. Teachers' self reflection on their positioning as professional learners re-emerged later in the meeting, after

conversation about students' evolving practices with digital devices:

752. **Researcher:** What do you think our role [teachers] will be in that?
753. **Vicki:** Learning it [how to use technology] for a start.
754. **Researcher:** If they can use it.
755. **Tash:** Research.
756. **Vicki:** Mmmh.
757. **Researcher:** Is there a special role for us?
758. **Anna:** I think you're gonna start off as a researcher.
759. **Vicki:** Mmmh
760. **Anna:** Um, you know you're gonna have to, as well as . . (short pause) you know finding stuff that you can use in your class, it's um, researching, what you know, how the children are gonna learn. Having some of that theory behind it, so you know why you're doing things, not just . .
761. **Vicki:** Yeah doing it coz you've been told you've gotta use that device.

In the above excerpt, Vicki (753), Tash (755) and Anna (760) explicitly construct themselves as active professional learners. In particular, Anna (760) and Vicki (761) began to construct professional learning as a theoretical and inquiry-driven process involving teacher purposes, rather than a top-down process of implementation. Analysis of the fourth meeting illustrates how participatory professional learning continued to evolve.

#### **The fourth meeting: Sharing dilemmas about participatory professional learning**

During the fourth meeting in the following month, Tash returned to problematising her school context. As an example, Tash remarked on challenges to her development of literacy pedagogy:

379. **Tash:** So I thought we'd put the books down for them [students] to use, but we'd just keep rotating different books on the whiteboard, so they [students] could, listen to stories and see it there where it's playing there *for* them (speech emphasis)
380. **Vicki:** Yeah
381. **Tash:** and then they [students] could go back [to the print texts]
382. **Vicki:** Mmmmh
383. **Tash:** And a funny comment I had at the staff meeting today, was one of the deputies said to the other deputy, '*Do you think that was appropriate?*' (sounding angry)

Vicki and Brooke responded to this recount with gasps. A minute or so later, Tash elaborated:

391. **Tash:** But because they've [students] had that scaffolding and they've listened to the stories, coz they kept changing them over, they thought it was *great* (speech emphasis) and they kept going, 'Look, I can read this!' And one of the deputies came through and didn't actually *look*.

The researcher noted some non-linguistic information about this interchange:

*Tash becomes quite animated, waving her hands around, rocking backwards and forwards slightly in her chair and putting her hands to her head. The other participants are frowning and surprised, giving Tash a lot of focused eye contact and attention.*

In response to Tash's recount, Vicki and Brooke offered support:

392. **Vicki:** Ooooooh Oooooh (in-drawn breaths)

393. **Brooke:** Dear me!

394. **Vicki:** *They* (speech emphasis) [deputies] are not being appropriate. They've got no idea what happens in a pre-primary.

These excerpts from the fourth meeting indicate several developments: teachers' ongoing experimentation with multiliteracies practice, and empathetic negotiation of emergent challenges. The fifth meeting gave teachers opportunities to reflect on these experiences.

### **The fifth meeting (including final focus group): Comparing the book club experience to other professional learning**

In the final meeting, Brooke was the third teacher to describe her drawn storymap:

1323. **Brooke:** Alright, me. OK. I said, um, first, *this is us* (*dramatic speech emphasis*), so I'm not a very good drawer (points to drawing of stick figures).
1324. **Vicki:** Ha ha ha (laughing)
1325. **Brooke:** Yeah you'll laugh.
1326. **Ronnie:** Ooooh
1327. **Group:** Laughter
1328. **Brooke:** Different experience base (pointing to this comment on her storymap). And then I've, this is how I found the group at the beginning: friendly, sharing, supportive and I found learning from others, informative and funny. So I enjoyed coming along. And I didn't put love of scrumptious food.
1329. **Anna:** And that was important really wasn't it? Other wise
1330. **Brooke:** {and scrumptious cakes (smiley voice).
1331. **Anna:** {you wouldn't come if you didn't enjoy it.
1332. **Brooke:** And you know what I, what I think about a good coffee.
1333. **Group:** Yeah (laughing)

Brooke (1323) began by ascribing the book club with a common identity, using the phrase 'this is us' to reflect members of the group. On her poster, book club members had been drawn as a group of stick figures. In consequent comments, Brooke (1328, 1330, 1332) marked affective and aesthetic elements of the book club as significant influences on participation. Later in the meeting Brooke elaborated on her perception of the book club experience:

1463. **Brooke:** I think it's another way of doing [professional learning], instead of just sitting down, taking notes, listening and having a quick chat at the end, this [book club] is more interactive. And that's what *I* (speech emphasis) like about it?

In the comment above, Brooke contrasted participation in the multiliteracies book club with her experiences of transmissive professional learning. Shortly afterwards, Anna employed a different contrast:

1472. **Anna:** I think it's interesting actually to compare it [the multiliteracies book club] to *book clubs* (speech emphasis). My idea of book club is, everyone reads a book and you come in and then you talk about it, so you're sharing those ideas about a text.
1473. **Vicki:** Mmmm
1474. **Anna:** Whereas this [multiliteracies book club] was more, everyone was sharing different ideas? And we were able to make the links, but um so I didn't necessarily feel it was a traditional book club.

In the above comments, Anna alluded to distinct features of the multiliteracies book club: a joint focus on a variety of texts, an emphasis on collaborative inquiry, and resourcing of teachers' sociocultural diversity. Shortly afterwards, Anna and Vicki made further comments about participatory aspects of the book club:

1487. **Anna:** I think for me, it was a very effective format. Because it was ongoing?

1488. **Researcher:** Mmmm

1489. **Anna:** So it wasn't you sitting for a whole day, you know doodling on your piece of paper (laughing) while someone talks *at* you (speech emphasis). So it was ongoing and it was interactive and you had time in between each meeting to sort of think.

.....  
1497. **Vicki:** Yeah similar. I like to talk about it and look at something and then go away and see what you can do *with* what you've just talked about (in the group). As I *did* (speech emphasis).

Anna and Vicki both emphasised the importance of sustained opportunities to discuss and explore new practices and understandings in the book club, and to translate them into classroom teaching. A minute or so later, Anna and Vicki continued to comment on the climate of the book:

1509. **Anna:** You didn't feel like, if you said something you were gonna be judged.

1510. **Vicki:** Yeah.

1511. **Anna:** Coz everyone who was there, wanted to be there. A lot of times when you're at PD, there are people who have been sent by the school (laughing voice).

1512. **Vicki:** Yes, true.

1513. **Anna:** So I felt like we all wanted to be there, and we all wanted to,

1514. **Vicki:** Yeah.

1515. **Anna:** get something out of it (smiling).

In the comments above, Anna (1509) identified the book club as a nexus for peer-driven purposes, trust and collaboration, unlike her experience of school imposed professional learning (1511). These perceptions seemed to be confirmed by all three teachers in their responses to the last focus group question: *How do you feel about coming to the end of book club?*

1708. **Vicki:** I need more information. (laughing)  
 1709. **Brooke:** Yes I need more information. (droll)  
 1710. **Anna:** Yeah and I don't think it's necessarily about being *given* information (speech emphasis), it's about coming up with it, as a group.  
 1711. **Vicki:** Mmmm  
 1712. **Anna:** And like everyone does a little experiment or something, so then everyone else gets extended because of that.

In these final comments, Vicki, Brooke and Anna expressed their desire to continue learning (1708, 1709, 1710), which Anna framed as a collaborative process based on shared purposes (1710, 1712).

### Summary of findings for the third section

This section has illuminated contrasts between teachers' prior experiences of transmissive professional learning, and collaborative exploration and support enabled by the book club. These findings are summarised in Table 14.

**Table 14**

*Main findings of the third section of analysis*

- 
- Five teachers commented on transmissive features of professional learning in school contexts.
  - The group problematised professional learning in the wider context.
  - During final reflections, three teachers identified shared and peer-driven purposes, joint focus and social support as important features of the book club.
- 

### Chapter Summary

The analysis chapter has identified several shifts in these seven teachers' perspectives and discourses. Analysis has focused on a wide selection of transcripts to reflect participation in multiliteracies knowledge processes, meaning making about multimodal text and participatory processes of professional learning. In the next chapter these findings will be discussed in relation to the research questions of this study, and debates in the wider literature.

## **CHAPTER FIVE DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

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Chapter Five interprets and discusses findings from the analysis. The first section discusses themes in the findings, and relates them to the wider research and academic literature. The second section extends beyond the focus of the research questions to elaborate empirical relationships between multiliteracies processes of learning (The New London Group, 1996, 2000), community of practice processes (Wenger, 1998), and intercontextual processes (Arvaja, 2012; Gee & Green, 1998; Kress, 2010). Implications and limitations of the study are outlined in the third section before the final conclusion.

### **Interpreting Themes from the Study's Findings**

Chapter Five addresses the four research questions posed at the beginning of this study. Although findings are complex and developments non-linear, thematic continuities and contrasts reveal several overarching patterns (Gee, 2011; Kress, 2010; Saldana, 2011). The first cluster of themes is discussed below.

#### **How did these teachers' perceptions and knowledge of literacy develop through the five book club meetings?**

Findings from the analysis suggest that teachers gradually began to co-participate in discourses of multiliteracies. Subsections below explore and comment on four themes specific to this development.

#### ***Expressing diverse situated constructions of literacy***

The first book club meeting facilitated teachers' exploration of situated practices and understandings (The New London Group, 1996, 2000). During this meeting, teachers articulated diverse literacy perspectives and priorities. One area of contrast related to the presence of both traditional and multiliteracies perspectives. The analysis demonstrated for example, how Anna and Tash recognised literacy as an integrated repertoire of diverse communicative practices, a view



consistent with multiliteracies (Bull & Anstey, 2010; Cope & Kalantzis, 2013; The New London Group, 1996, 2000). On the other hand, Fiona and Vicki gave significance to established print approaches, reflecting a traditional perspective (Bull & Anstey, 2005; Gee, 1990; Cope & Kalantzis, 2013). Rather than having equal footing, multiliteracies and traditional perspectives were expressed hierarchically (Gee, 2011; Kress, 2010). That is, in several instances of discussion during the first meeting, traditional approaches to literacy were validated and emphasised as primordial. Additionally, Fiona, Vicki, Anna and Tash asserted that current classroom practices were mainly centred on print focused pedagogies.

These acknowledgements allude to the continuing dominance of heritage perspectives in the wider milieu (Kress, 2010; Luke, 2010). Across recent decades, the exclusivity of print focused literacy has been a focal concern for proponents of democratic education (Gee, 1990; Janks, 2010; Kress, 2006). The multiliteracies perspective critiques two consequences of this exclusivity: inequitable social and material effects related to stratification of cultural knowledge; and the marginalisation of socially conscious and variable practices for modern communication (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012; The New London Group, 1996, 2000).

During situated knowledge work (The New London Group, 1996, 2000), teachers drew on diverse sociocultural, biographical and institutional knowledge/s. This process enabled them to share and consider multiple peer purposes and value positions. Kooy (2006), in her work with Canadian book clubs, argues that exposure to this diversity empowers teachers to unveil discourses and assumptions about literacy. Unveiling of variable conceptual and sociocultural knowledge during purposeful talk is important from a social practice view of learning (Gee, 2011; Kress, 2010; The New London Group, 1996, 2000; Wenger, 1998).

Later in the first meeting, as teachers continued to unveil diverse beliefs and assumptions about literacy, fractures in perspective taking

emerged. For instance Fiona and Brooke recognised that traditional literacy perspectives afforded little understanding of new inclusions in the *Australian Curriculum: English*. Such discontinuities affirm how Australian teachers may be struggling to negotiate reform processes, particularly regarding disjunctures between new terminology and existing knowledge bases (Luke, 2010, 2013).

In summary, during the first meeting, although the multiliteracies perspective was subordinate, four teachers expressed both traditional and multiliteracies constructions of literacy teaching and learning. Articulations of multiliteracies were focused on textual aspects of diversity. The next theme situates these discourses in systemic policy processes.

### ***Identifying a prescriptive policy context***

During the first meeting, complex patterns of interaction began to develop as teachers explored contextual influences on the construction of literacy. For example, during processes of critical framing (The New London Group, 1996, 2000), teachers considered literacy in the context of curriculum reform. In particular the analysis highlighted Fiona's claim that educational policy had dictated Australian teachers' print based pedagogies. In the second meeting, this theme was revisited when Anna and Tash attributed print focused enacted classroom practices to prescriptions in the *Australian Curriculum: English*. For Anna and Tash, these prescriptions sat in contradiction to goals for balanced and creative student learning. Resonating with a growing body of research, this finding points to the many challenges faced by Australian primary school teachers in respect to enlarging and balancing literacy approaches (e.g. Comber, 2011, 2012; Lobascher, 2011). Challenges include a print focused policy environment (Cumming, Kimber & Wyatt-Smith, 2011; Klenowski, 2009, 2010).

Murphy (2011) argues that traditional prescriptions in official curricula reflect discursive trends in the current Australian policy

environment: misalignment between expansive teaching goals and practical strategies for change; and an emphasis on measurable aspects of literacy teaching and learning in line with competitive assessment practices. In such circumstances, finer level descriptions of learning in curriculum documents gloss over diverse constructions of literacy, to reproduce the existing status quo (Green, 2008; Luke, 2010, 2013; Luke, Woods & Weir, 2013). In so far as policy documents continue to de-prioritise nontraditional constructions of literacy, conditions for critical and balanced literacy pedagogy are detoured (Green, 2010; Luke, 2010). This steering of the policy environment contrasts with the conditions needed to enable a diverse and multiliterate society.

The next theme reflects how teachers began to consider other constraints on literacy approaches.

### ***Perceiving professional constraints***

In the second, third and fourth meetings, teachers problematised how multiliteracies practices might be supported more broadly. In academic literature, this problematisation is recognised as catalytic for knowledge expansion (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Opfer & Pedder, 2011). In this study, problem posing frequently oscillated between two multiliteracies processes of learning: situated practice and critical framing (The New London Group, 1996, 2000).

One thread concerned teachers' perceptions of material constraints on multiliteracies pedagogy. As an example, analysis of the second meeting presented Jo's reports of limited classroom access to digital technology. Such perceptions are again considered in Murphy (2011), who argues that digitally enhanced learning remains marginalised in schools because print based technologies and resources are prioritised. In this environment, pedagogical opportunities to develop digital practices are undercut. This is at odds with the goals of the *Melbourne Declaration* and the multiliteracies perspective (Bull & Anstey, 2010; Cope & Kalantzis, 2013; The New London Group, 1996, 2000) to

promote students' flexible and conscious participation in technologically enhanced learning. In other words, despite overarching policy rationales for balanced and integrated literacy provision, dominant traditional discourses continue to inform and constrain pedagogy and resourcing at local levels (Luke, Woods & Weir, 2013).

Another thread of critical framing involved administrative control and surveillance of teachers' pedagogies. From a sociocritical perspective, this control is viewed as a discursive practice for maintaining traditional literacy discourse (Gee, 2011; Kress, 2010). It is significant that in the present study, one teacher's recurrent reports of surveillance were shared at a time when educators have become increasingly accountable to a print focused policy environment (Comber, 2011, 2012; Lobascher, 2011). Nonetheless these teachers' processes of critical framing suggest emerging awareness of sociopolitical aspects of the pedagogical milieu, and how literacy might be construed in other ways. The next theme identifies how other constructions were brought into being during parallel negotiation of multiliteracies discourse.

### ***Negotiating and developing multiliteracies discourse***

Alongside discussions throughout the study regarding contextual constraints, teachers pursued a shared interest in multiliteracies. The analysis demonstrated how inquiry was first facilitated mainly through researcher-led overt instruction (The New London Group, 1996, 2000), where new metalanguage and conceptual schemas were purposefully situated in learners' existing understandings. Findings indicated that this group of teachers had previously experienced limited access to explicit multiliteracies discourse. For instance, the analysis foregrounded Brooke's early perception of multiliteracies metalanguage as foreign, and Vicki, Fiona and Jo's initial reliance on traditional strategies for textual meaning making.

By the third meeting, teachers' mutual development of multiliteracies understandings began to feature. Although learning continued to be supported through researcher-led overt instruction, discussions were increasingly shaped through peer-led exploration. More specifically, teachers' sourced concepts, objects, stories and literary texts, displaying dynamic and democratic processes of learning (Cumming-Potvin, Baillie & Bowden, 2013; Green, 2005). The analysis revealed that teachers' meaning making about these resources was recursive and negotiative, which is consistent with a pedagogy of multiliteracies (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012; Kress, 2010; The New London Group, 1996, 2000). In these ways, book club participation was shaped for-and-by teachers, in response to their needs and interests.

In reflections during the final meeting, Vicki and Anna explicitly associated book club participation with expanding notions of literacy. In particular, Anna identified an emerging awareness of textual diversity, which she specifically attributed to her knowledge work in the book club. She also commented on how book club focuses intersected with her interests as a classroom teacher.

Below, a final theme highlights the absence of a particular facet of literacy discourse.

### ***An absence of discourse about standardised assessment***

One theme was conspicuously absent from any book club discussion: the topic of standardised assessment. Superficially, this finding conflicts with the results of several recent Australian studies, which report significant shaping of pedagogy around assessment imperatives such as NAPLAN (Cumming, Kimber & Wyatt-Smith, 2011; Klenowski, 2010; Lobascher, 2011). However, three particularities of the book club study might be important for explaining this absence. First, it may be significant that some focus questions (in the first and last meetings) mentioned curriculum but not assessment. In prospective research, this unplanned bias would need to be addressed. Second, these seven

teachers' perspectives may have been affected by the time of the year in which the research took place. That is, the multiliteracies book club took place in the post- rather than pre-NAPLAN part of the teaching year. Third, none of the teachers in the book club were teaching a NAPLAN tested grade level. In view of these three circumstances, an absence of talk about assessment remains inscrutable. Nonetheless, one might ponder how another book club group, with different collective experiences, might articulate perspectives about assessment at an earlier time of the year.

### ***Summary of themes regarding literacy***

Themes in relation to the first research question suggest that:

- Teachers in the book club arrived with diverse but hierarchical understandings of literacy, where print-focused constructions were dominant.
- Teachers acknowledged print-focused enacted pedagogies, which they attributed to a prescriptive national curriculum and a professional context dominated by traditional literacy discourses.
- Participation in the multiliteracies book club enabled teachers to negotiate a widened range of text types, literacy strategies and discourses. Developments included shifts towards peer-led and collaborative inquiry.

Themes specific to teachers' engagement with multimodality are considered below.

### **How did these teachers articulate engagement with multimodality through the book club?**

The analysis revealed that the topic of multimodality was largely absent from teachers' initial discourse. Additionally, two teachers expressed challenges in trying to access understandings about multimodality prior to the commencement of book club. As the analysis

progressed, the group gravitated towards digital texts and resources. In particular, Vicki, Tash and Anna's experimentation with multimodal texts became a focus for collaborative discussion. In contrast, teachers' explicit use of metalanguage remained absent. The following themes reflect these discourses and processes.

### ***Previous constraints on understanding multimodality***

Analysis of the first meeting represented Vicki and Tash's previous challenges in seeking understandings about multimodality. It remains unclear whether these efforts were motivated by intrinsic, professional or institutional purposes, as this was not explored in the study. Notwithstanding, Vicki suggested that teachers had little access to professional learning about multimodality in schools. Additionally, Tash claimed that the concept had remained abstract during university retraining. These claims suggest that in general, teachers may have limited access to discourses involving multimodality, a situation identified in other Australian literature (Cumming, Kimber & Wyatt-Smith, 2012; Tonkin & Wilkinson, 2010; Walsh, 2010).

In addition, although all Australian teachers are mandated to use the *Australian Curriculum: English* (indeed Vicki reported attending professional development about the English curriculum), discourse in the book club demonstrated that teachers' readings of this policy document did not support understandings of multimodality. This finding parallels other commentary, which asserts that the *Australian Curriculum: English* is not detailed enough to inform teachers' knowledge seeking about multimodality (Cumming, Kimber & Wyatt-Smith, 2012; Tonkin & Wilkinson, 2010; Walsh, 2010). It may be that unmet need motivated some of the teachers to participate in the present study. Their ongoing interest in multimodality is captured in the next theme.

### ***Book club as a context for exploring multimodality***

As the book club unfolded, teachers began to deconstruct a range of multimodal texts and co-construct strategies for interacting with them. As teachers shaped content and focuses around self-selected resources, knowledge work gradually became more peer-led. In particular, the analysis showcased Anna, Tash, and Vicki's increasing recognition of textual diversity, and new orientation to digital forms of communication. However, consistent with a pedagogy of multiliteracies (The New London Group, 1996, 2000), knowledge building was not linear: Analysis illuminated how teachers continued to negotiate emerging understandings by questioning discontinuities between traditional and multiliteracies constructions of literacy.

Negotiation sometimes involved reframing instrumentalist discourse (Kress, 2010). Serving traditional literacy agendas, this discourse constructs digital texts as tools for orienting students to print learning. An example emerged in the third meeting, when Tash couched information technology as a motivational tool for print driven purposes. However, later analysis of the same meeting, demonstrated how Anna revisited and reframed this perspective on technology. Such recursivity is a feature of dynamic multiliteracies learning (Bull & Anstey, 2010; Cope & Kalantzis, 2013; The New London Group, 1996, 2000), and critical and inquiry-driven social learning (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Kress, 2010; Opfer & Pedder, 2011).

Another aspect of negotiation related to how Anna, Vicki, Brooke and Tash began to identify multimodal elements of digital texts (the designed) and explore production of meaning in multimodal texts (designing) (Kress, 2010; The New London Group, 1996, 2000). The analysis focused in particular on Vicki's recursive experimentation with digital devices and applications. Anna and Tash evidenced similar practices in later meetings. Circularity between learning experiences in the book club and classroom contexts became an important factor in peer-led co-construction. From a social learning perspective, resourcing



of texts and practices across book club and professional contexts demonstrated how teachers inter-related different realms of sociocultural experience (Kress 2010; The New London Group, 1996, 2000; Wenger, 1998).

In summary, initial discourse in the book club revealed teachers' limited participation in discourses around multimodality. In contrast, social meaning making and negotiation in the book club began to feature co-development of understandings about multimodality. In caveat, the next subsection clarifies limits regarding these developments.

### ***The finding of a metalanguage 'lag'***

Despite various developments mentioned above, all teachers in the book club displayed limited production of metalanguage. More particularly, the analysis demonstrated that although all teachers used terms like 'multimodal' or 'multimodal texts', explicit metalanguage was only demonstrated during one episode of researcher-led overt instruction in the second meeting. This finding associates with another: While four teachers identified multimodal elements of text during later meetings, no teacher at any time grappled with designs of meaning. This more complex term refers to how variable patterns of meaning combine across modes in specialised ways (Jewitt, 2008; Kress, 2010).

The absence of metalanguage production can perhaps be explained in relation to the design of this study. First, although The New London Group (1996, 2000) proposed that metalanguage is key to conscious participation in multiliteracies, the authors envisioned this as an element of sustained knowledge work. Other research studies have found that explicit metalanguage emerges only over significant periods of time. Kitson, Fletcher and Kearney (2007) for instance, interpret five-months of action research as providing only beginning opportunities for teacher-researchers to extend metalanguage repertoires. Kitson et al. suggest teachers' first exposures to multimodality lead to awareness-

of rather than production-of metalanguage, and that extensive opportunities are necessary for ongoing development. In compliment, Jewitt (2008) cautions that over-emphasis on production of metalanguage reverts professional learning to practices of transmission. Taken together, the work of Jewitt and Kitson et al. points to the benefits of extended time frames for metalanguage development. These suggestions are consistent with those of other theorists, who maintain that teachers need sustained opportunities to participate in multiliteracies discourse for deep understanding of concepts such as multimodality (Bearne, 2009; Kress, 2011).

### ***Summary of themes regarding multimodality***

Findings in relation to the second research question suggest that:

- Two teachers had previously experienced challenges when seeking to learn about multimodality.
- Book club became a site for collaborative exploration and negotiation of understandings about multimodality.
- Explicit production of metalanguage in the book club was limited.

The next section compares teachers' previous experiences of professional learning with experiences in the book club.

### **What were these teachers' perceptions of professional learning in the current context of public primary school education?**

In the first meeting, the seven teachers reflected on a number of previous experiences, including prior professional learning. The analysis revealed that transmissive and policy oriented professional learning was prevalent. In later meetings, teachers identified how these experiences contrasted with the book club experience.

### ***Identifying transmissive and policy focused professional learning***

The analysis presented Vicki, Fiona and Brooke's recounts of transmissive professional learning, which positioned them as receivers of knowledge at the hands of 'expert' presenters (Mockler, 2013; Sachs, 2000). On one occasion, Vicki associated this experience with the 'roll

out' of the *Australian Curriculum: English*. Like Australian teachers in previous decades (Sachs, 2000), Vicki, Fiona and Brooke expressed dissatisfaction with generic and decontextualised content presented to them during these events.

These three teachers' perspectives accord with the findings of Doecke and Parr (2011). This survey revealed that large-scale workshops continue to be a prevalent method for teachers' professional learning in Australia. In these workshops, learning is generally equated with policy implementation. Transmissive arrangements of this kind have received significant academic critique, particularly regarding the assumption that professional learning should revolve around neoliberal policy focuses and reductive prescriptions for pedagogy (Connell, 2013; Kostagriz & Doecke, 2013; Hardy & Melville, 2013; Mockler, 2013).

During early book club discussions, Tash and Anna also revealed experiences of more participatory versions of professional learning, where teachers apply given workshop strategies in their classrooms over time. Nonetheless in these accounts, teachers were still positioned as implementers of knowledge generated elsewhere. From the perspective of this study, these formats are interpreted as a more subtle form of transmissive professional learning, serving policy imperatives rather than situated needs (Green, 2010). The next theme underlines how in contrast, teachers in the book club engaged in inquiry-driven learning for situated purposes.

### ***Book club as a context for participatory professional learning***

In contrast with transmissive formats of professional learning, this study sought to foster social and inquiry-based learning (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Mockler, 2013; Opfer & Pedder, 2011). Previous sections of this chapter have underscored how participatory inquiry emerged, and how teachers ultimately shaped learning focuses. In particular, prior discussion argued that co-determination and co-construction were important mechanisms for increasing participation.

The analysis revealed how five teachers explored and co-constructed understandings of multiliteracies and multimodal texts. In addition, Anna, Tash, Vicki and Brooke began to identify themselves as learners and researchers. In the final book club meeting, Anna, Vicki and Brooke emphasised how the book club experience was different to transmissive professional learning. Further, they expressed an intention to continue social inquiry after the conclusion of the study. These acknowledgements and goals resonate with a participatory professional stance (Loughran, 2012; Mockler, 2013; Sachs, 2000).

The evolution of participatory processes in the book club speaks back to notions that professional learning should be 'provided' through generic workshops (Loughran, 2012; Mockler, 2013; Sachs, 2000). In turn, the positioning of teachers as active learners speaks to the strengths of facilitated and collaborative opportunities for negotiating professional knowledge (Kress, 2010; Levine, 2010; Wenger, 1998). In this study, participation began to rebalance teachers' previous positioning as conduits for policy, a situation that had afforded little understanding of new inclusions in Australian curriculum, or evolving literacy practices. In line with Connell (2013), results of this study suggest that small-scale participatory cultures (like the book club) contribute to informed diversity rather than homogenisation. This positioning of learning and learners is central to the multiliteracies perspective (Bull & Anstey, 2010; Cope & Kalantzis, 2013; The New London Group, 1996, 2000).

### ***Summary of themes regarding professional learning***

Themes in relation to the third research question suggest that:

- Transmissive and policy focused professional learning was prevalent in these teachers' previous experiences.
- Book club became a context for emergent participatory professional learning.

The next section considers how participation was enabled in the social space of the book club.

### **How did the book club format contribute to the development of a community of practice?**

The multiliteracies book club was proscriptively designed to facilitate multiliteracies knowledge work (The New London Group, 1996, 2000) and participatory professional learning (Mockler, 2013; Sachs, 2000). Proscriptive design aimed to evolve participation in the social domains and processes of a community of practice (Wenger, 1998). The analysis demonstrated how participation in these domains and processes emerged through gradual but non-linear trajectories. To reiterate, communities of practice are reflected in the presence of:

- Mutual engagement, where learners are socially engaged in some form of negotiated action or practice;
- Joint enterprise, where learners collectively respond to a recognised goal or problem; and
- Shared repertoires, where learners share stories and cultural resources, and construct recognisable ways to talk about them.

Wenger (1998) argues that because communities of practice are dynamic, they cannot be identified against 'check lists'. However, discussion below considers how features of the book club related to Wenger's fourteen non-definitive indicators (p. 125).

#### ***Emergent community of practice learning domains***

The analysis alluded to how book club interactions created a context for Wenger's (1998) community of practice domains. Table 15 below represents how practices within the book club associated with each of the three domains.

**Table 15***Community of practice learning domains in the book club*

Domain	Practices in the book club
Joint Enterprise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-constructing shared discourses and understandings about literacy and professional learning</li> <li>• Sharing ways of doing things with digital texts</li> <li>• Imagining future professional learning after the conclusion of the book club</li> </ul>
Mutual Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Negotiating constructions of literacy</li> <li>• Problematising dilemmas and challenges</li> <li>• Critical framing of perspectives, experiences and practices</li> <li>• Building social relations in the book club through affective support</li> <li>• Demonstrating risk taking and trust, while disclosing professional dilemmas</li> <li>• Beginning to recognise group identity</li> </ul>
Shared Repertoire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drawing on shared stories and experiences</li> <li>• Using some multiliteracies terms</li> <li>• Sharing self-sourced resources and objects, and ways of using them</li> <li>• Sharing understandings about practices in classrooms</li> </ul>

Practices depicted above also point to the presence of community of practice processes of learning.

### ***Emergent community of practice processes of learning***

As reviewed earlier in this thesis, community of practice conditions nest four overlapping processes of learning (Wenger, 1998). These processes involve:

- doing things together,
- negotiating meaning,
- engaging in communal inquiry, and
- changing social relations and identity.

Teachers in the book club participated in a range of collaborative 'doing' and talking about literacy and professional learning. For instance, teachers negotiated and developed understandings about multiliteracies by oscillating between processes of situated practice and critical framing (The New London Group, 1996, 2000). As co-participation evolved, 'doing' emerged in another way: Researcher-led learning gradually balanced with peer-led modeling and scaffolding. This shift enabled teachers to shape interactions as a function of their diverse needs and interests. In this sense, participatory professional learning was dynamic and involved a range of social, conceptual and material resources (Cumming-Potvin, Baillie & Bowden, 2013; Green, 2005; Hung, Chen & Koh, 2006). The next theme explains how these processes were supported to evolve.

### ***The development of reverse peripheral participation***

The gradual forming of book club interactions around teachers' purposes and interests was a focus of the analysis. During theoretical framing, teacher-centred generation of the book club was conceptualised through the process of reverse peripheral participation (Hung, Chen & Koh, 2006). This process involves teachers in:

- ongoing articulation of beliefs, experiences, assumptions and understandings;
- co-recognition of shared goals and sociocultural diversity; and
- building trust and social support.

Wenger (1998) asserts that in communities of practice, learning directions are shaped to suit the shared purposes and goals of a particular community. In other words depending on learner's purposes, certain meanings, practices and repertoires become emphasised during interactions. This shaping may be either implicit or explicit.

This study argues that in the book club, reverse peripheral participation was associated with emerging participatory professional learning (Mockler, 2013; Sachs, 2000), and recursive participation in

the four multiliteracies knowledge dimensions (The New London Group, 1996, 2000). For example, teachers used their experiences and evolving knowledge base as an ongoing referent to express, consider and reframe purposes for literacy teaching. Reverse peripheral participation therefore enabled teachers to negotiate and appreciate diverse perspectives and evolve common purposes. In the final meeting, three teachers explicitly acknowledged and valued this tie between socially oriented aspects of the book club and interest-based learning.

### ***Summary of themes regarding community of practice***

Themes in relation to the fourth research question suggest the emerging presence of Wenger's (1998) community of practice learning domains and processes of learning. Hung, Chen and Koh's (2006) process of reverse peripheral participation was considered a key influence on the emergence of community of practice conditions and processes in this study.

### **Summarising the themes**

So far, this chapter has interpreted themes in relation to the four research questions and the wider research literature. For easy reference, themes are summarised below in Table 16.



**Table 16**  
*Summary of themes in the findings*

Research questions	Themes
Findings revealed	
1. How did these teachers' perceptions and knowledge of literacy develop through the five book club meetings?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diverse understandings of literacy, dominated by print focused discourses</li> <li>• Perceptions of a prescriptive policy context</li> <li>• Perceptions of contextual constraints on professional practice</li> <li>• Collaborative learning and negotiation of multiliteracies, shaped by teacher-driven focuses</li> </ul>
2. How did these teachers articulate engagement with multimodality through the book club?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Existing challenges to seeking knowledge about multimodality</li> <li>• Collaborative exploration of multimodality in the book club</li> <li>• Limited metalanguage production</li> </ul>
3. What were these teachers' perceptions of professional learning in the current context of public primary school education?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceptions of transmissive and policy focused professional learning</li> <li>• Contrasting participatory professional learning in the book club</li> </ul>
4. How did the book club format contribute to the development of a community of practice?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emerging community of practice domains and processes of learning</li> <li>• Processes of reverse peripheral participation</li> </ul>

The next section goes beyond the original research questions to elaborate empirical relationships between multiliteracies (Bull & Anstey, 2010; Cope & Kalantzis, 2013; The New London Group, 1996, 2000), community of practice (Wenger, 1998) and intercontextual processes.

### **Co-emergent Processes of Learning**

Some theorists have commented on the importance of 'fleshing out' how teachers engage with multiliteracies discourse, so that democratic professional learning can be better supported (Bearne, 2009; Fletcher,

2005; Rogers, Mosely & Kramer, 2009; The New London Group, 1996, 2000). Additionally from a participatory research stance (Guba & Lincoln, 2008), it is important to understand teachers' knowledge processes so that theoretical formulations of multiliteracies can continue to respond to embodied processes of negotiation (Kress, 2010; The New London Group, 1996, 2000). These two goals are particularly important in the current Australian policy context, which detours multiliteracies in preference to narrow and politically vested constructions of literacy and professional learning (Comber, 2012; Luke, 2010, 2013; Tusting, 2012).

To elaborate how teachers engage with participatory learning for multiliteracies, this section considers relationships between:

- multiliteracies and community of practice processes of learning; and
- meaning making in book club and classroom contexts.

### **The co-emergence of multiliteracies and community of practice processes of learning**

During the design phase of this study, it was proposed that community of practice (Wenger, 1998) and multiliteracies processes (The New London Group, 1996, 2000) would mutually support learning within book club interactions. This proposal rested on the principles of a pedagogy of multiliteracies (The New London Group, 1996, 2000), and participatory constructions of professional learning, which situate teachers' knowledge building in collaborative and negotiative processes (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Mockler, 2013; Sachs, 2000). While a qualitative case study approach seeks to describe and interpret patterns in social phenomena rather than attribute causality (Yin, 2012), findings of this study reveal strong associations between multiliteracies and community of practice processes of learning. Table 17 below depicts the co-presence of these processes in teachers' knowledge work in the book club.

**Table 17**

*Co-emergent multiliteracies and community of practice processes of learning*

	Doing	Negotiating meaning	Communal inquiry	Social relations
Situated practice	Sharing perspectives, knowledge and experiences	Encountering multiple perspectives	Discussing viewpoints	Appreciating diversity
Overt instruction	Simulating, and explaining, new practices and new terms	Constructing meanings and practices	Collaborating in new practices	Recognising shared interest
Critical framing	Framing dilemmas, constraints and limitations on practice	Recognising dis-continuities in discourse	Comparing, and negotiating various practices and perspectives	Trusting the group with professional dilemmas; Giving affective and conceptual feedback
Evolving practices	Exploring practices and sharing self sourced texts	Reframing and balancing dominant discourses	Imagining future collaborative inquiry	Recognising the group as an entity with shared goals and repertoires

Identifying empirical relationships between multiliteracies and community of practice processes of learning (as depicted above) is important because such associations affirm the premises of the theoretical framework (Kress, 2010; The New London Group, 1996, Wenger, 1998).

The next section details how teachers created continuity in learning across contexts of participation.

### **Weaving and intercontextuality: How teachers shaped directions of learning in the book club**

In Cazden (2006) the construct of weaving refers to how learners (students and teachers) integrate knowledge from different dimensions of experience. This can involve cultural and/or cognitive domains. By making these connections, learners relate new conceptual understandings to existing experiential knowledge. Learners' resourcing of variable knowledge/s and practices across different contexts is a core tenet of sociocultural and situated views of learning (Gee, 1990, 2011; Kress, 2010; The New London Group, 1996, 2000). From these perspectives, learning occurs as a dynamic process of interaction with sociocultural, material and conceptual resources available in experiential environments. In discourse studies, the translation of objects and understandings across communities of experience is specifically referred to as intercontextual meaning making (Arvaja, 2012; Gee & Green, 1998).

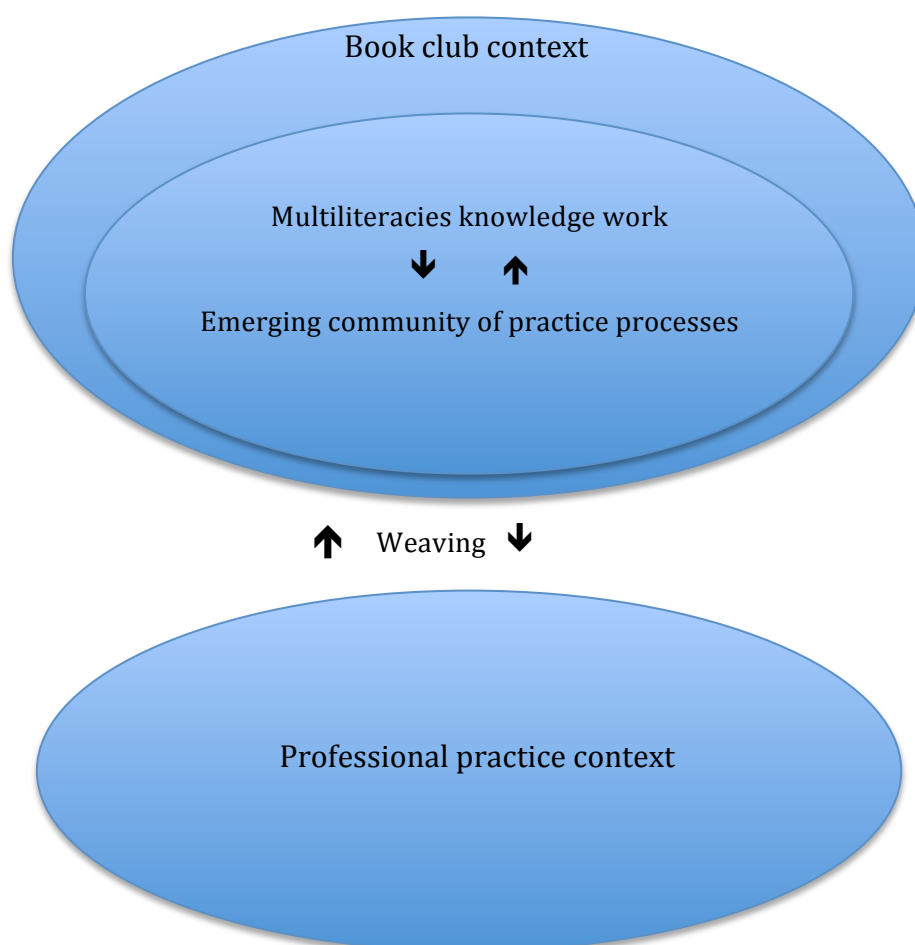
Findings from the present study suggest that teachers created bi-directional flows in practices and meanings between book club and classroom contexts. In this study, teachers' weaving across contexts is referred to as 'intercontextual weaving'. This process was tacit in the group's 'doing' and 'knowing', and intrinsic to how teachers in the book club began to:

- co-construct understandings;
- make newly encountered discourse relevant-to and continuous-with classroom based needs and interests; and
- introduce diversity into collaborative learning opportunities

While actualised classroom practices were not within the purview of this study, teachers' reports about the translation of book club practices into classrooms expanded the scope of book club discourse. Below, Figure 10 depicts how weaving and intercontextuality informed processes of learning in the book club.

**Figure 10**

*Intercontextual weaving as a resource for meaning making in the book club*



Intercontextual weaving is amenable with Wenger's (1998) concept of multimembership, where learners negotiate discourses as they participate in different communities, and carry discourses and objects across community boundaries (p. 129). This flow can create both continuities and discontinuities in learning. From a community of practice perspective, the flow of tools, stories and anecdotes into a social learning space gives form to the discourses and purposes of that community.

It is possible to argue that intercontextual weaving became particularly significant in the present study due to the dislocation of book club learning from teachers' situated professional practices. In

other words, the fostering of a distinct learning space might seem to act in cross-purposes with situated professional learning. However in an educational climate dominated by policy driven imperatives (Luke, 2013), the perceived vulnerability of collaborative professional learning to administrative coercion was a concern (see Gee, 2000). Notably, these coercive processes seemed to be confirmed in Tash's accounts of administrative surveillance and control. In contrast, Anna articulated her belief that book club allowed teachers to be free of institutional agendas and evaluation.

In summary, intercontextual weaving in the book club enabled teachers to introduce resources and experiential reflections into learning opportunities for a variety of purposes:

- to inform the direction and content of group discussion;
- to recursively explore situated beliefs, understandings and practices across contexts; and
- to represent and work through discontinuities and tensions between different literacy and professional learning discourses.

### **Implications, Limitations and Avenues for Further Research**

The following sections consider implications and limitations of these findings and offer recommendations for further research.

#### **Implications of the study**

In considering qualitative research more generally, Weseen and Wong (2000) comment that:

*We take for granted that the purpose of social inquiry at the turn of the century is not only to generate new knowledge but to reform "common sense" . . . and critically inform public policies, existent social movements, and daily community life. A commitment to such 'application' however, should not be taken for granted.*

(p. 60)

While building a case for teachers' active participation in professional learning, this study has recognised seven teachers'

commitment to pedagogical relevance and multiliteracies learning. Further, teachers' voiced perspectives reinforce the beliefs held by many that:

- Existing transmissive and policy-oriented versions of professional learning do not satisfy teachers' situated needs or interests (Doecke & Parr, 2011; Mockler, 2013; Sachs, 2000).
- The prioritisation of traditional agendas in Australian curriculum reform has tended to hinder rather than support teaching and learning for multiliteracies (Hipwell & Klenowski, 2011).
- Teachers can collaborate in social and conceptual professional learning with a focus on multiliteracies discourse (Bearne, 2009; Fletcher, 2005; Luke, 2013).

In this study, teachers began to demonstrate that ongoing professional learning about literacy involves negotiating historical, institutional and policy narratives. Through multiliteracies knowledge processes (The New London Group, 1996, 2000) teachers began to reframe and expand existing approaches to literacy, and to explore a diverse range of texts and sociocultural practices for making meaning, although perhaps not yet revealing a deep recognition of sociocultural diversity.

While challenging and developing understandings about literacy, teachers in the book club demonstrated how learning can be transferred bi-directionally across book club and professional communities. While the current case study was not designed to impact on or utilise data from classroom contexts, results suggest that book club learning had potential to influence teachers' enacted understandings and discourses. On the other hand, results also emphasised how teachers can shape social and conceptual learning opportunities for professional relevance and diverse needs.

In theoretical terms, this study affirms how teachers actively engage with and shape multiliteracies focuses. In particular, data provided empirical support for theorised relationships between multiliteracies (Bull & Anstey, 2010; Cope & Kalantzis, 2013; The New London Group, 1996, 2000) and community of practice processes of learning (Wenger, 1998), and suggested how teachers weave learning opportunities together across realms of experience (Arvaja, 2012; Cazden, 2006; Gee & Green, 1998).

In summary, the study indicated that a group of teachers can negotiate, reframe and evolve understandings and perspectives of literacy in a collaborative professional learning setting such as the multiliteracies book club. The possibility of this social participation in professional learning may be of interest to other teachers, as well as to administrators and policy makers, who wish to develop literacy understandings and perspectives with relevance to twenty-first century communication.

### **Limitations of the study**

The main limitations of this study pertained to a restricted time frame for teachers' ongoing and collaborative development of the multiliteracies perspective, metalanguage production, and recognition of sociocultural aspects of diversity (Bull & Anstey, 2010; Cope & Kalantzis, 2013; The New London Group, 1996, 2000). In part, time constraints reflected pragmatic concerns of Masters by Research work. It is reasonable to propose that teachers might begin to balance sociocultural and textual focuses if facilitated in further collaborative opportunities over a longer time span. Beyond these time-based limitations, the following discussion acknowledges how the chosen theoretical framework and research design impacted on knowledge claims (Crotty, 1998).



First, in qualitative approaches, findings are bound to the particularities of the study context, and cannot be generalised to other social situations and phenomena (Yin, 2012). This is because knowledge and knowing about social phenomena vary as a function of relationships and characteristics in context (Carter & Little, 2007; Schwandt, 2000). On the other hand, case study data, and its interpretation, can inform wider applications of theory and practice (Yin, 2012). Previous sections of this chapter have been tendered in this spirit. Second, inferences about this case study are understood to be subjective research constructions rather than ‘real’ and complete representations of truth (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). That being said, several research strategies were introduced into this study to bolster movement towards ‘thick description’, rigor and trustworthiness (see Methodology and Research Design in Chapter Three).

Third, this case study was not theorised to interpret individual differences between teachers, but focused on co-constructive processes at the group level. For example, analysis did not explore how individual biographies contributed to individual learning trajectories, although this would be a worthy focus for research (see Strong-Wilson, 2008). Fourth, while book club interactions were analysed for the presence or absence of particular processes and discourses, these were not quantified, and were not theorised in terms of phases of development. Lastly, although some multimodal data analysis occurred, methods of data collection and analysis mainly focused on dialogue.

Limitations on the interpretation of results might also be considered in terms of rival explanations (Yin, 2012). Some alternate interpretations have already been considered in earlier parts of this chapter. Two further rival explanations are noted here. The first involves teachers’ compliance with a perceived research agenda, reflecting elements of transmissive learning. However in counter to this reading of the project, the analysis has demonstrated how teachers’ learning processes were actively negotiated and shaped (Arvaja, 2012:

Gee & Green, 1998); and that teachers voiced interest-based rather than obligatory participation (Kooy, 2006; Mockler, 2013). Additionally, the participatory agenda of this research (Guba & Lincoln, 2008; The New London Group, 1996, 2000) required that teachers' interests were placed at the centre of participation, through reverse peripheral participation (Hung, Chen & Koh, 2006).

Recommendations for further research are offered below, some of which address limitations mentioned above.

### **Recommendations for further research**

Possibilities for further research include several adaptations of the present study. Perhaps the simplest involves repeating a similar study with an extended time frame, to establish peer-led participatory learning and balanced consideration of textual and sociocultural aspects of the multiliteracies perspective. Alternately, a similar design might seek to support a different cohort of participants, such as beginning, remote or pre-service teachers. Many contemporary theorists express concern for beginning and pre-service teachers in regard to competing literacy discourses (see Cumming-Potvin, 2009; Kooy, 2006; Parr, Bellis & Bulfin, 2013). Multiliteracies (The New London Group, 1996, 2000) and community of practice processes (Wenger, 1998) in a book club setting, appear to enable teachers with ways to negotiate these competing narratives. As examples, multiliteracies book club research could aim to support early career teachers to negotiate dilemmas about literacy practice; and/or to create continuity between university and practice-based literacy discourses. Alternatively, a multiple book club case study might explore and compare collaborative multiliteracies learning across combinations of career phases (for example integrating the work of Admiraal, Akkerman & de Graaf, 2012).

On a different note, the possibility of a fully formed multimodal approach was extant in this study. Multimodal research (see Flewitt, 2011; Hurdley & Dicks, 2011) could detail teachers' evolving and embodied engagement with multimodal artefacts and resources. Such inquiry recognises that technological aspects of teachers' professional practice are an important focus for expanding approaches to literacy (see Lim & Oakley, 2013).

Levine (2010) claims that Wenger's (1998) theorising is not as successful as some others, for illuminating the inner contradictions experienced by teachers during shifts to new understandings. Some elements of the current study signalled how teachers' biographical experiences influenced their stances on literacy, although these influences were not explored in depth. A future project might integrate biographical reflections, perhaps drawing on the work of Strong-Wilson (2008), or describe identity shifts in relation to evolving literacy practices (see also Roberts, 2006; Silseth & Arnseth, 2011). Additionally, a strong case might be made for exploring how and why interpersonal dynamics influence multiliteracies learning in social spaces like the book club.

## **Conclusion**

The multiliteracies book club was conceived to support teachers in participatory professional learning for multiliteracies (Bull & Anstey, 2010; Cope & Kalantzis, 2013; The New London Group, 1996, 2000). At the beginning of this thesis, Chapter One presented needs and challenges in regard to developing multiliteracies understandings. During literature review in Chapter Two, an expanded view of literacy and professional learning was contextualised in the wider landscape of shifting literacy discourses. It was argued that Australian public primary school teachers navigate competing narratives about literacy teaching and learning (Green, 2008; Luke, 2013) in a policy environment closely aligned with print-focused production of literacy (Hipwell & Klenowski, 2011; Snyder, 2008). The prioritisation of

traditional literacy in curriculum reforms (Luke, 2013; Sawyer, 2010; Tonkin & Wilkinson, 2010), and the prevalence of transmissive and policy focused professional learning (Doecke & Parr, 2011; Mockler, 2013), were considered main constraints on teachers' innovation of literacy teaching and learning.

In counter, this study aimed to support teachers' inquiry-driven engagement with evolving versions of literacy, by fostering conditions for multiliteracies learning (The New London Group, 1996, 2000) in a community of practice context (Wenger, 1998). Drawing on situated principles of a pedagogy for multiliteracies, and more recent theorising of reverse peripheral participation in communities of practice (Hung, Chen & Koh, 2006), teachers' professional interests and purposes were positioned as a focus point for collaborative book club inquiry. Chapter Three outlined a qualitative case study approach (Yin, 2012), and choices of research methodology and methods. Gee's (2011) critical discourse analysis was justified as a tool for interpreting developments in the multiliteracies book club context. Select chronological analyses of book club interactions and discourse were represented in Chapter Four.

Findings from the analysis point to these seven teachers' discursive shifts toward multiliteracies perspectives and understandings. These shifts rested on collaborative, negotiative, and co-determined inquiry about a diverse range of texts, practices, understandings and discourses. Discussions in the current chapter outlined how professional learning in the multiliteracies book club emerged through particular conditions and processes, and how these processes and conditions served teachers' interests and commitments. In total, these findings contest current Australian policy and curriculum provisions, which limit literacy teaching and learning to established pedagogies and understandings.

The New London Group (1996) argues that:

*The role of pedagogy is to develop an epistemology of pluralism that provides access without people having to erase or leave behind different subjectivities. This has to be the basis of a new norm.*

(p. 72).

Teachers in the multiliteracies book club clearly demonstrated emerging epistemologies of pluralism. These teachers combined facets of professional learning in complex ways through:

- sharing common understandings and purposes while also appreciating pedagogical diversity;
- engaging in collaborative knowledge work while also negotiating and critiquing existing knowledge and assumptions;
- unpacking and questioning continuities and discontinuities in literacy discourses; and
- appreciating a common literacy heritage while also expanding repertoires of practice for twenty-first century communication.

In these ways, the teachers in this small project contributed to pluralism and diversity, in the interests of multiliteracies enablement. Such commitments offer hope for gradually realising The New London Group's (1996, 2000) vision of participatory social futures.

## APPENDICES

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**Appendix A: Gardiner, V., Cumming-Potvin, W., & Hesterman, S. (2013). Professional learning in a scaffolded 'multiliteracies book club': Transforming primary teacher participation. *Issues in Educational Research*, 23(3), 357-374.**

Professional learning in a scaffolded 'multiliteracies book club':  
Collaboratively transforming primary teacher participation

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In response to rapidly changing communication practices in an increasingly technological world, evolving literacy concepts such as multimodality, are now acknowledged in the new Australian Curriculum. Ironically, primary schoolteacher professional development in Western Australia remains closely tied to a monomodal, print focussed paradigm. This study integrated the multiliteracies and communities of practice frameworks, aiming to generate participatory professional learning about new literacy concepts. This qualitative case study explored how one group of seven public primary schoolteachers from outer metropolitan WA, collaboratively transformed their literacy learning during a scaffolded 'multiliteracies book club'. Spanning six months and including five book club meetings and two focus groups, teachers collaborated with the researcher-facilitator (first author) in multimodal practices using diverse text formats and resources. This paper presents early thematic analysis of book club discussions, finding evidence for teachers' shift towards multiliteracies' perspectives, within a community of practice. The study highlights how the participative features of a multiliteracies book club model can support literacy transformation.

**Keywords:** Professional learning; Multiliteracies; Community of Practice; Book Club; Multimodality.

## **Introduction**

Australian public schools have recently been mandated to implement national curriculum and standardised testing, overseen by the Australian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (ACARA) (Green, 2010; Lingard, 2010). Rationales of the newly launched curriculum argue the need for all school students to engage in heightened collaborative, creative and critical thinking for 21<sup>st</sup> century learning. The *Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum: English* (ACARA, 2010) acknowledges some of the changes needed for literacy in a digital age. For the first time, primary teachers are required to teach both about-and-with multimodal texts. But multimodality is only broadly defined in the curriculum documents, and no rationale is given for its relationship to existing practice (Walsh, 2010). Because of the simplistic way multimodality is collaged into the curriculum, it is unclear how teachers might come to understand the concept, and underpin their practices with new theory (Klenowski, 2009; Murphy, 2011; Walsh, 2010).

Under current educational reforms, professional learning in Australian public schools is impacted in a number of ways. Due to wider policy processes, teachers are positioned as technicians who must implement externally prescribed curriculum imperatives (Hardy, 2010; Lingard, 2010; Smyth, 2006). At one-off expert-run professional development events, teachers are often further positioned as technicians (Hardy, 2010). These workshops are customarily linked to rationalistic school-based forward planning, for the strategic production of improved results on standardised print assessments (Lingard, 2010; Luke, 2010). These initiatives are increasingly geared towards training teachers to improve student performance in relation to normed outcomes on standardised testing via the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) (Luke, 2010, Lobascher, 2011). Professional development is therefore commonly a system-initiated process, in service to the operation of top-down curriculum and policy initiatives (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Hardy, 2010). Rather than initiating transformative literacy practice, new curriculum inclusions are likely to be subsumed into teachers' existing print-based literacy paradigms (Hipwell & Klenowski, 2011).

Given the current Australian educational context, the purpose of this study is to scaffold teachers in their inquiries into multiliteracies and multimodality, through collaborative professional learning in a teacher 'book club' community of practice (Wenger, 1998). The project aims to further our notions of the ways that WA public primary school teachers can develop new understandings about multimodality. The broad research question is: *'How can a group of WA public primary school teachers, engage with professional learning via a 'multiliteracies book club'?*

The four sub-questions asked:

- What are teachers' perceptions and knowledge of professional literacy learning in the current context of public primary school education?
- How do participant perceptions and knowledge of literacy develop over the course of the book club meetings?
- How do participants articulate engagement with multimodality over the course of the study?
- How can the book club format contribute to the development of a community of practice?

A further aim is to make an original contribution to knowledge by inter-relating multiliteracies and communities of practice frameworks. In doing so, the study seeks to identify factors that these teachers perceive as enhancing or inhibiting their professional learning in the current context. This informs how book clubs may make a contribution to a multiliteracies shift. This article represents the early analysis of themes emerging from teacher dialogue in one such book club.



## Theoretical perspectives

### Multiliteracies as an emerging literacy perspective

Literacy is a multidimensional meaning making process: it activates knowledge and practices for understanding and creating spoken, visual, multimodal and print texts (Wing, 2009). In the 90's, a group of leading literacy specialists 'The New London Group' (Cazden, Cope, Fairclough & Gee, 1996) argued that 'multiliteracies' are needed to engage with this complexity for modern times. The multiliteracies framework asserts that a repertoire of literacy practices need to include but also go beyond attention to the printed word; thus this framework involves multimodal meaning making processes, through interdependent visual, aural, oral, gestural and spatial modes (Hipwell & Klenowski, 2011). These modes of communication feature prominently in everyday Australian texts, accessed ubiquitously through television, the Internet, mobile phones and iPads.

Multiliteracies (Cazden et al., 1996; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000), is definitively concerned with critical practices relating to the diverse array of texts now available, and the modal layering of meaning within these texts. This may include overlaying print and images, and/or moving and still forms, and need not be interpreted in a linear way by the reader/viewer (Mills, 2011). In digital environments, genres also overlap, generating a plethora of text types (Kress, 2006). The need for conscious understandings and critical literacy practices is paramount, to enable readers/viewers/ writers/performers to recognise and link formats and meaning to contexts of use (Bull & Anstey, 2010).

Multimodality, is concerned with sign systems (semiotics) and the way that meaning is constructed and interpreted by participants via their bank of meaning making understandings (Kress, 2006). It specifically refers to the range of 'possible' meanings in the modes of a text, that contribute to simultaneous, dynamic and interdependent effects on the potential meaning making process (Kress, 2006; Mills, 2011). Traditional print paradigms are not concerned with the diverse cognitive, affective and social character of multimodal meaning making (Kress, 2006; Mills, 2009). Kress (2006) argues however, that an increasing focus on these concerns is pivotal for a relevant 21<sup>st</sup> century curriculum for English.

A pedagogy for multiliteracies suggests both a metalanguage and a learning sequence for designing relevant 21<sup>st</sup> century learning around multimodal texts (Cazden, et al., 1996; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). This pedagogy seeks lays a path between what learners already know and can practise with print, towards more sophisticated practices with complex digital forms of communication. Cazden et al. offer four possible dimensions for active and recursive participation in these knowledge processes: '**situated practice**' where known experiences and knowledge form the base for bridging to new learning; '**overt instruction**' where learners work with explicit and relevant metalanguage in order to articulate and conceptualise the available meanings in text; '**critical framing**', where different possible interpretations of text meanings are provoked and problematized; and '**transformed practice**' where learners redesign and transform their original practices by creating responses to the social, economic and cultural agendas in text.

This cycle is aimed to deepen and expand existing repertoires of literacy practice, through responsive educational experiences (Cazden et al., 1996; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). In doing so, the socio-critical elements of multiliteracies pedagogy are brought into being, through active citizenship and authentic connections to lived experience. Collaborative dialogue and equity are important factors in this active process. However, for those teachers previously immersed only in a traditional print paradigm, the foregrounding of 21<sup>st</sup> century authenticity and multimodality require new learning and pedagogy (Kress, 2006).

A core tenet of the multiliteracies paradigm is that pedagogical transformation requires a life-long response to our evolving global and local environments (Cazden et al., 1996). This socially situated view of professional learning resonates with Wenger's (1998) 'community of practice' (CoP) model.

### **CoP: 'Multiliteracies book clubs' as a metaphor**

As we participate and communicate in an increasingly digital world, the importance of theorising social learning has become apparent (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). Social participation in professional learning can be viewed as a process of enacting particular group memberships. Wenger's 1998 CoP framework, locates social learning as participation in community. Definitive features of a CoP are: individuals' participation in shared experiences; learning through inquiry and social interchange; and learning through discussion and 'doing'. These processes of participation affect how participants perceive themselves. Wenger (1998) proposed that mutual inquiry and practice in a CoP supports learners in facing joint challenges as they:

- use the community as a catalyst for change and innovation;
- co-create a group culture;
- identify as belonging within that culture.

Some caveats exist. CoPs can be more or less innovative depending on their propensity for novel and critical thinking (Levine, 2010). Further, not all social groups are CoPs, so CoPs must be referenced against the social learning processes of Wenger's (1998) framework. Also, individuals establish increasing participation in the practices and meaning making of different collectives, so new knowledge and practices can flow between different communities.

A thriving CoP enables teachers to consider pedagogical issues with critical awareness, while they experience multiple perspectives, new knowledge and practices (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). The conception of teachers as collaborative and purposeful intellectuals who work in community, sits well with teacher activism as expressed in critical perspectives (Blackmore, 2007). However, empirical studies have shown that in Australian public school contexts, professional reflection and multiple perspective taking are often constrained by the homogenizing effects of system wide agendas (Comber & Nixon, 2009; Luke, 2010; Maloney & Konza, 2011). The formation of a professional CoP, independent of the school environment, could shed useful light on the ways in which teachers move into or reconnect with literate worlds in the face of current reforms.

The recent evolution of the book club as a research format represents a new approach to collaborative inquiry (Kooy, 2006; van Veen, Zwart & Meirink, 2012). A small number of research studies have used the popular metaphor of the 'club', including teacher literature circle clubs (Monroe-Baillargeon & Shema, 2010), teacher education book clubs (Reilly, 2008) and video clubs for teacher professional learning (van Es, 2012). Kooy (2006) has explored teacher book clubs in Canada, aiming to support novice teachers in inquiry-based professional learning. Using social learning theory and Wenger's (1998) CoP framework, Kooy (2006) elaborates how the conversational culture of book clubs can support exploratory talk and authentic ongoing professional learning for new and experienced teachers. While reading and conversing about interest-based choices of texts with educational themes, teachers in her studies shared and 'storied' their professional learning. Kooy used a narrative approach, to analyse the emergence of interdependent relationships, dialogue and learning in the clubs.

A multiliteracies book club potentially provides similar opportunities for socially scaffolded learning. Early versions of the scaffolding concept (Bruner, 1986) referred to interactional support between learners in social learning situations, where learners become increasingly independent as they participate successfully in a knowledge domain or process. Refining this further, Green (2005) defines scaffolding as a complex process of:

*Motivating others; understanding and working from people's capabilities; engaging learners in the challenge at hand; finding a balance between autonomy and independence; and providing demonstrations or examples (p. 3).*

Scaffolding in this book club aimed to include egalitarian learning around: dialogue between participants; recursive opportunities for knowledge building; shared metalanguage; and encounters with related realia and resources. Kooy (2006) reports that scaffolding can also be affective, as peers can provide encouragement and motivation for exploring new knowledge, practices and identities. This study was purposefully designed to empower teachers through these social opportunities and processes.

## **Methodology and research design: The case study, participants and data collection**

The research questions focus on the unfolding perspectives and understandings of practitioners as they engage in an innovative professional learning context: the multiliteracies book club. In qualitative approaches, discussion between diverse actors is viewed as an empirical basis for interpretation (Schwandt, 2000). A qualitative explanatory case study approach is appropriate because such approaches are characterised by the generation, description and deep relational analysis of a rich array of qualitative data, emerging from the interactions of a small number of participants in context (Yin, 2012). Interpretation of emergent discussions is framed by multiliteracies (Cazden et al., 1996) and CoP (Wenger, 1998) perspectives, and informed by socio-cultural and socio-critical theories. Socio-critical interests (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998; Schwandt, 2000) concern positioning and empowerment of participants as learners.

Following receipt of institutional ethics approval, the researcher-facilitator recruited seven teacher participants from several public primary schools, within a low socio-economic, outer metropolitan area of WA. The project was

presented informally to school principals, who granted informed consent for access to staff by letter drop and/or a short information session. Subsequent voluntary teacher participation took place independently of school administrative protocols: this independence was maintained throughout the course of the book club along with the anonymity of participants.

Data in this study were collected over the six months between May and October. To cross-reference interpretations (Yin, 2012), an array of data was collected. These sources included: discussions from two semi-structured focus groups; discussions from five book club meetings; researcher-facilitator real time observations of interactions in the book club; teacher produced documents; blog postings and researcher reflections. A researcher journal (Holloway & Biley, 2011), supported the critique of emerging biases and decision-making during the research process. In qualitative inquiry approaches, the subjectivity and positioning of the researcher is always enacted in relation to participants (Carter & Little, 2007; Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2009; Schwandt, 2000). As the researcher-facilitator was also a participant in the group, and shared in common an interest in co-learning as an experienced teacher, the journal became useful for creating reflexivity between the researcher's personal tendencies, biases and 'blind-spots' and the research process (Yin, 2012).

At the beginning of the first focus group, a short questionnaire garnered background information about the teacher participants. All participants spoke English as a first language, with one teacher also speaking sign on a regular basis. Six were born in Australia, and one in the Middle East. Six teachers had over ten years teaching experience, with one teacher having practiced between five and ten years. Collectively, the participants had worked in a wide range of teaching contexts in metropolitan and remote Western Australia, including: K to 7 classroom teaching; policy development; English, Science and Early Childhood Learning Area Co-ordination; Aboriginal Education; Special Needs Education Support; First Steps Getting it Right for Literacy Co-ordination; and Co-ordination of Students at Educational Risk. The current placements of these teachers were primarily in pre-primary (alternatively called pre-school) and the early years of primary schooling. Five teachers located themselves as between 46 to 55 years of age, with two teachers being between 36 and 45 years of age.

To explore participant perspectives and knowledge about literacy and professional learning, the study began and ended with semi-structured focus groups (Patton, 2002), as part of the first and last meetings. During these focus groups, participants were prompted with seven questions in a semi-structured format. The body of the study involved five collaborative book club meetings, lasting one to two hours. Each meeting included light refreshments in the comfort of a local community centre, convenient to participants. Meetings were designed to support conversational discussion and knowledge sharing (Kooy, 2006). A multiliteracies pedagogical learning sequence (Cazden et al., 1996; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) provided a loose guide for structuring the five meetings. Over the span of the study, activities were planned to shift from focused researcher-facilitator support, to interest based and group initiated encounters with metalanguage and a wide range of multimodal texts and resources. The resources and text were selected to draw on the teachers' interests and specialty areas. In the first meeting for instance, a tailored collection of a dozen early childhood postmodern picture books was informally viewed by the group, to situate multiliterate discussion in textual

enjoyment and reflection. The researcher-facilitator had found that in her prior professional learning interactions with early childhood teachers and students, postmodern picture books had generated significant discussion. These texts are useful conceptually because they feature multimodal, meta-fictional and multilayered meaning making in a format that is recognisable and familiar to primary and early childhood teachers (Bull & Anstey, 2010). Throughout the book club, other textual resources were also shared by the researcher-facilitator such as videos, websites and iPad applications, sometimes with associated scaffold sheets to aid concept and metalanguage building. Digital audio recorders were used to record all discussions, which were subsequently transcribed and annotated with real time observations (using participant pseudonyms). The teachers produced some written and drawn texts, including a collaborative planning document, reflection sheets and individual story-maps. For additional discussion and sharing of resources throughout the study, all participants had access to a private and password-controlled online website and blog.

Given limitations of space, this paper focuses on the early analysis of emergent themes from the book club discussions. These themes represent insights into the development of teacher perspectives, knowledge construction, and relational learning. Early analysis involved manual open coding of patterns in the discussions (Yin, 2012). Real time observational notes were considered important in this process, as they provided contextual and interactional details, such as notes on facial and gestural responses. Interpretation through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (Gee, 2011) is expected to further elucidate the research questions. Future analysis will also aim to cross-reference data sources.

### **Data analysis: Teachers' development over five meetings.**

This analysis represents early insights into the development of teachers' perspectives and knowledge building, during the complex social process of the book club. Four research sub-questions are used to organise processes and emergent knowledge that emanated from discussions over the course of the five meetings. The sequencing of these research questions facilitates the flow of analysis from early teacher responses and perspectives, through to shifting teacher practices and understandings.

#### **Research sub-question one: What are teachers' perceptions and knowledge of professional literacy learning in the current context of public primary school education?**

At the beginning of the study, interactions were slightly formal as the teachers got to know each other. Consequently initial focus group discussion was mainly elicited through researcher-facilitator scaffolding with semi-structured focus group questions. At first, literacy professional development relating to the rollout of the new Australian Curriculum emerged as a dominant topic. The group reported that all teachers in the district, sometimes hundreds at a time, had recently attended Australian Curriculum workshops, orchestrated by school administrations and district officers. The teachers expressed perceptions of these workshops that were consistently negative. For example, Fiona evaluated these events as '*often quite disappointing*' in regard to what teachers wanted. Vicki believed that the content was limited because it '*was all so repetitious*'. Referring to the delivery of content, Brooke added, '*they [the presenters] rush through*' and '*there is no flexibility*'.

A few minutes after this interchange, Tash elaborated on how she thought these experiences inhibit teacher literacy learning. Tash believed that in general, primary teachers were getting '*bogged down with the specifics of what's given in the national curriculum*'. In support, Anna suggested that this was affected by what she perceived as an overemphasis on some aspects of literacy such as reading and writing in the new curriculum:

*The expectations of pre-primary have changed immensely . . . we are covering so much reading and writing type literacy . . . I do feel they [students] are missing out on other stuff*

Later in the session, diverse views on professional learning experiences were revisited. Anna believed that some professional development formats had enhanced her professional learning. For instance, she said that some of her experiences with oral language development had been '*really good*'. Anna believed this was because these experiences had been spaced out so there was time to apply learning:

*over 3 or 4 or more sessions with time in between, to think about what you'd done and apply it.*

Vicki immediately echoed this belief. However, Fiona countered with an alternate example, recounting her required attendance at smaller one-off professional development events as a select school representative. She believed these formats imposed challenges:

*Our mission is to excite the [other] staff. . . . to a level that we are excited about a particular policy.*

Vicki emphasised this perception of imposition, saying that sometimes it is '*dry stuff*', but it's still something '*you* [as a school professional development representative] *just have to do*'.

In summary, participant responses revealed a range of perspectives on professional development in the first focus group. Generally, the participants associated professional development with prescribed curriculum reform imperatives. This appeared to create dilemmas for some teachers, which had remained unresolved. In contrast, active and participatory formats were valued if they were spaced across alternating periods of practice. This was not associated with recent professional development rollout of the new literacy curriculum.

### **Research sub-question two: How do participant perceptions and knowledge of literacy develop over the course of the 'book club' meetings?**

In the first focus group, discussions about professional learning led logically into teachers' consideration of their perceptions and knowledge about literacy. Teachers tended to draw on their shared knowledge and literacy experiences (see situated practice, Cazden et al., 1996), foregrounding their experiences with the Australian Curriculum and specific alphabetical and phonics programs. In association with these approaches, Fiona reminisced on her past pedagogical experiences, when she had known '*exactly what to do*', and followed the curriculum '*in tiny little steps*'. A repeated theme across participants was an allusion to the importance of content such as phonics, vocabulary work, reading words and sounds, decoding and writing, as the

groundwork of literacy. At several different points in the discussion, other literacy practices were relegated to the category of ‘other stuff’.

As teachers later became more confident during this discussion, some began to offer detail about what the category ‘other stuff’ might include. Anna commented that:

*I think for me literacy is about comprehension and expression. So it's not necessarily talking or writing or reading, it can be however you are trying to express yourself.*

Vicki introduced the idea of real world relevance when reflecting on the meaning of literacy:

*Um, you want children to be literate in society, you want them to be able to function with print, with computers, whatever they need to use.*

These utterances again resonated with Cazden et al.’s concept of situated practice. In these ways, teachers shared the known, the familiar, and aspects of literacy they perceived as precluded by current reforms, providing a starting point for learning in the next meetings.

In general, the first and second meetings involved researcher scaffolded interactions (Bruner, 1986) with multimodal resources and texts, and drew on what teachers already knew. However, the third, fourth and fifth meetings, gradually balanced this dependency (Green, 2005) through teachers’ increasing participation in active knowledge building and co-inquiry. This was evidenced in:

- a growing presence of spontaneous peer-led sharing;
- and peer-scaffolded learning interchanges.

For instance, Vicki, Anna, Brooke and April engaged in interest-based sharing of multimodal literacy resources, which they invoked through longer and deeper periods of collaborative discussion. Anna was the first teacher to spontaneously present and discuss the visual elements of a multimodal picture book, during Meeting 3 (see overt practice, Cazden et al, 1996). A few minutes later, April demonstrated how she had used her collection of story-writing iPad applications. By Meeting 4 and 5, these four teachers were engaging in extended episodes of social scaffolding. This included teachers’ discoveries and investigation of a wide range of apps.

During Meeting 4 and 5, some teachers began to share how they had changed their situated practices by experimenting with new literacy practices in their classrooms. These interactions became reminiscent of transformed practice (Cazden et al., 1996). For instance in Meeting 4, Vicki presented her first attempts at working with the gestural mode via photographic representations of Olympic sports people. During these socially scaffolded episodes, the teachers witnessed each other’s different thinking processes about exploratory literacy practice, and also usually shared feedback about how to extend practices. For example, Vicki’s sharing of her Olympic focus in Meeting 4, elicited Tash’s co-constructive feedback, thus linking to the concept of critical framing (Cazden et al., 1996). Tash made suggestions for how Vicki could do ‘the [multiliteracies] cycle again’ to improve and deepen her planned focuses. As Vicki explored iPad apps for this purpose, Brooke and Tash concurrently offered Vicki real time ICT skill support. In Meeting 5, Vicki represented these practices in a more developed form, building on the feedback that was offered in Meeting 4. This core of four teachers likewise

demonstrated other examples of transformed practice (Cazden et al., 1996). In Meeting 5 for example, during general conversation, Anna reflected on her pedagogical shift towards social learning in the classroom, when she introduced new iPads to her students:

*I've started off um, working with the kids with them? But I found they actually learnt more working with each other? You know talking about it and just having a go?*

By Meeting 5, Anna, Vicki and Brooke were beginning to articulate deeper awareness of literacy as a flexible repertoire, not merely to be spoken about as practices with print and phonics. In the final focus group session, Anna asserted:

*It's about broadening your horizons ... making me think about different texts, and studying a text for itselfs sake.*

Soon after this comment, a lengthy spontaneous discussion ensued about these teachers' new recognition of everyday exposure to multimodal texts. Vicki initiated this interaction, questioning how authors of everyday texts position consumers through particular multimodal choices. Vicki summarized by saying that:

*It's really relevant to understand, what is happening with our society ... our literate or illiterate society.*

Vicki's articulation of literacy as a social practice at the end of this exchange, highlights a collective process of critical framing of literacy practice (Cazden et al., 1996).

### **Research sub-question three: How do participants articulate engagement with multimodality over the course of the study?**

In the second meeting, it emerged that though all teachers had participated in literacy professional development, most teachers explicitly acknowledged little understanding of terms such as multimodality. In the early meetings, Brooke, who was sometimes given to humorous hyperbole, would exclaim that new metalanguage was like a '*foreign*' language. This typically elicited supportive jokes, sighs and laughter from the rest of the group.

To support teacher understandings about metalanguage, the researcher-facilitator designed and produced several scaffolds to be used during collaborative activities. For example, in Meeting 2, metalanguage definition sheets were used to assist collaborative meaning making as the group revisited the researcher's collection of children's postmodern picture books. Teachers freely selected a text they felt drawn to, from the researcher-facilitator's professional collection. The following extracts reveal snippets of conversations as teachers engaged with the text of their choice and scaffolds. Initially teacher comments were expressed as common-sense observations when viewing the picture books:

*Vicki: There's information in the pictures.*

*Jo: I have no idea what the book's about, I'm just looking at that one page ... There's a lot of comedy used in it.*

After reading and discussing the linguistic scaffold sheets, the teachers began to apply metalanguage in their observations:



Jo: *So yeah. There's that many things you could discuss colour, effects and everything, with this, just this one page.*

By Meeting 5, changing attention to multimodality emerged in other ways. Vicki, Brooke and Anna remarked that they had begun to notice multimodal layering of texts in their everyday environments. Anna asserted that *'everything's becoming so multimodal'*, with Vicki remarking that she had found a health magazine at home with *'bits all over the place, like you would see, on a webpage'*. Vicki also shared her burgeoning personal interest in digital graphic novels. She professed that her participation in book club had changed her *'own reading'*.

Although classroom practice outcomes were not part of this study, teachers sometimes indicated that their independent experimentation with new multimodal literacy practices, as a consequence of book club participation, had been impacted by factors in their schools. In particular, Jo, Brooke and Tash reported finding experimentation difficult, due to limited access to technology. Jo commented on this during a collaborative activity in Meeting 4:

*Well to be honest, like regarding computers, I don't have a range of access to them. ... and you know, ... you only get 50 minutes of computer time every week ... And that's what I find really frustrating.*

Overall, these discussions reflect teachers' active learning, and also some of the challenges they encountered in their desire to put their learning into practice.

#### **Research sub-question four: How can the 'book club' format contribute to the development of a community of practice?**

In the month of October, only three participants and the researcher-facilitator could be present for Meeting 5, due to the teachers' many commitments. However, during this meeting, Brooke, Vicki and Anna, eagerly shared their perceptions of the book club. Brooke offered her perception of the group:

*I found the group friendly, sharing, supportive [and] learning from others, informative and funny.*

Anna immediately responded to this:

*That was really important wasn't it? Otherwise you wouldn't come.*

Brooke later elaborated on her perception of the social format:

*You've got the coffee and you've got the chat, which is nice ... almost like a coffee club.*

Relational features were revisited later that evening as teachers tried to articulate for each other what they valued most about the book club. Brooke spontaneously shared her insight into why she thought the social format of book club was successful:

*It's almost the connection, the base of people.*

During this final session, these teachers also framed their perceptions of learning in the book club format. Anna said she appreciated the *'diverse ideas and experiences'* shared by the teachers. Vicki remarked further on the usefulness of the learning:

*The information we've got from each other's been really valuable.*

Anna added that the book club was 'effective' because it was 'so new, and something we were all interested in'. Some of Anna's later utterances suggest that she believed knowledge was scaffolded collaboratively rather than passively received at the hands of the researcher-facilitator:

*It's about coming up with it, as a group [where everyone] gets extended.*

At various times in this last meeting, the teachers spontaneously discussed book club in relation to other traditional professional development. Anna said she thought there was a 'deep' difference between book club and other professional learning experiences. All three teachers offered a comment about this:

*Brooke: And I think also with the book club, I think it's another way of doing, instead of just sitting down, taking notes, listening and having a quick chat at the end, this is more interactive?*

*Anna: So it wasn't you sitting for a whole day, you know doodling on your piece of paper (laughing voice) while someone talks at you. So it was ongoing and it was interactive and you had time in between each meeting, to sort of think.*

*Vicki: And it's more relaxed, and you feel happy to give and share, rather than a static, you know one person there, telling you, and maybe one or two people will be able to throw something back.*

Towards the end of the final focus group session, Anna made a telling remark:

*You didn't feel like, if you said something you were gonna be judged.*

Organized around the four research questions, these data point to how teachers perceived professional learning in the current Australian context. The teachers express a shift towards multiliteracies learning, and discuss how they believed the book club was important to this shift. The discussion will consider these points.

## **Discussion of emerging themes**

The presentation of the data gives us a brief glimpse into how this book club emerged as a space for relational learning, and scaffolded teachers in their understandings and perspectives about literacy. The following discussion begins by situating these teachers' perspectives in the context of wider reforms. This leads to a consideration of how important literacy shifts and developments emerged as teachers collaborated in shared opportunities to make meaning with multimodal texts (see Cazden et al., 1996; Kress, 2006). Lastly, the discussion reflects on shared inquiry and relational learning through the lens of CoP (Wenger, 1998).

During the first and final focus groups, the teachers shared perspectives about past professional learning experiences. There is a contrast between perceptions of book club participation and system initiated literacy professional development. All of these teachers' reported that their opportunities for relevant literacy knowledge building were inhibited in the context of the rollout of imposed Australian Curriculum. Most of the teachers highlighted how they were struggling to engage with externally generated curriculum pronouncements.

The teachers' perceptions of Australian Curriculum professional development call attention to impacts on literacy learning as a consequence of this reform process. Most of the teachers arrived at the book club with a propensity for common-sense expressions of multimodality. This contradicts policy assumptions that prescribed national curriculum will stimulate professional learning relevant to the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Luke, 2010). The book club study provides evidence that these teachers could collaboratively change this positioning in relation to new literacy practices.

During book club scaffolding, teachers were able to take their experiences, interests and existing understandings, and use them as resources for further inquiry. Consistent with a pedagogy for multiliteracies (Cazden et al., 1996; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000), all teachers participated in sharing multimodal understandings with increasing sophistication. Although the researcher-facilitator initially scaffolded the participants, their shared investigations gradually built momentum for 'doing' deeper and broader multimodal meaning making (Kress, 2006). Significant in this process was an expansion of the observed textual practices and reflections of four teachers. The data reveal that this core of teachers gradually took a finer interest in the available meanings of multimodal text types, and gained a heightened awareness of the layered and diverse nature of multimodal texts within their environments. Importantly, two of these teachers attributed their new orientations to their participation in the book club. The core group of four teachers also expressed other changes, such as an increasing interest in co-constructive and social classroom learning. These transformations are consistent with shifts towards multiliterate understandings and practices.

A particular aim of this book club study was to make a contribution to multiliteracies shift by interrelating multiliteracies (Cazden et al., 1996; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) and CoP (Wenger, 1996) frameworks. Teacher own comments provide evidence that they perceived interdependence between their collective literacy inquiries and participation in the book club's social learning format.

As the book club progressed, participative elements of Wenger's (1998) CoP framework became more salient in co-constructive processes. Spontaneous sharing, demonstrating, applying and evaluating of multimodal resources exemplified altered thinking, 'doing', and talking about that doing. As the group developed, teachers also became comfortable with voicing their perspectives: sometimes scaffolding the knowledge of their peers, and at other times thinking critically about their own learning in context. Sometimes scaffolding functioned through feedback, and sometimes it appeared to support affective motivation. Anna's sense of not being judged is a strong indicator of how trust developed in the group.

As an endnote to discussion, it is interesting that some teachers reflected explicitly on the format of book club. Three teachers expressed how they had looked forward each time to the '*coffee club*' feel of book club and to relaxed text sharing and learning. The contrast between this perception and the same teachers' perceptions of traditional professional development is informative. In sum, the analysis suggests that the conversational learning space of the book club, anchored in shared goals and engagement, instantiated many aspects of Kooy's (2006) book club model. It also elaborates this model through the integration of multiliteracies content and learning processes.

## Conclusion

This paper has presented early analysis of discussions, arising from a multiliteracies book club case study. Within a supportive social environment, collaboratively scaffolded learning opportunities emerged as important factors for the shift of a small group of teachers towards multiliterate perspectives. Data suggest that participants used the space provided by the multiliteracies book club for critical and social learning. It can be argued, against a wider backdrop of curriculum reform and generic professional development, that participation in book club assisted these teachers to reposition themselves as collaborative literacy knowledge workers. These findings may be of interest to policy makers, researchers and practitioners wishing to pursue innovative approaches to professional learning. The book club model appears to feature many characteristics important to the conceptual and sustained professional learning that teachers may require, in their quest to equitably access relevant and expanding repertoires of literacy practice.

## Limitations and future directions

The initial findings of this study suggest the value of further development through longer time frames and multiple cycles of learning. On this point, it is important to consider how opportunities emerge out of situated case studies, and how nuances and multiple agendas can be more widely considered (Yin, 2012). Along these lines, we acknowledge that any descriptions of impacts on these teachers' practice are by self-report only. Descriptions are also limited to these teachers' perspectives on learning, and are not evidence of verifiable pedagogical change. Neither can claims be made that any changes described in this study were sustained past the end-date of the book club. But the way these teachers might continue to negotiate book club learning in the wider educational environment may be of interest for further study. Future inquiry might also explore the supportive and egalitarian ethos of book club for scaffolding relational and conceptual development in different professional contexts. For instance the design of a book club format could be aimed to support collaborative mentoring of Australian graduate teachers, building resilience for the early years of practice through the sharing of perspectives and challenges.

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Veronica Gardiner is a postgraduate student, at Murdoch University Western Australia. She has an interest in critical perspectives on professional learning and literacy, in response to her experiences of being a public primary teacher in Western Australian schools.

Dr Wendy Cumming-Potvin is a Senior Lecturer in education at Murdoch University, Perth, Western Australia. She specializes in a critical perspective on learning, with a focus on social justice and multiliteracies. Wendy is a researcher for an Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching project aiming to develop critical pedagogies and social justice in engineering education. Recently, Wendy was named a key researcher in a Cooperative Research Centre project aiming to explore the role of technology in promoting the wellbeing and mental health of young people.

*Dr Sandra Hesterman is a senior lecturer in education at Murdoch University, Perth, Western Australia. Her research, grounded in postmodern theories, examines how teachers integrate information and communication technologies in their program to support and enrich students' multiliteracies experiences.*

## Appendix B: Institutional ethics approval letters



[www.murdoch.edu.au](http://www.murdoch.edu.au)

**Research Ethics Office**  
Division of Research and Development

Monday, 20 February 2012

Dr Wendy Cumming-Potvin  
School of Education  
Murdoch University

Chancellery Building  
South Street  
MURDOCH WA 6150  
Telephone: 9360 6677  
Facsimile: 9360 6686  
[human.ethics@murdoch.edu.au](mailto:human.ethics@murdoch.edu.au)  
[www.research.murdoch.edu.au/ethics](http://www.research.murdoch.edu.au/ethics)

Dear Wendy,

**Project No.** 2012/004  
**Project Title** Exploring 'multiliteracies book clubs' for primary teacher professional learning: A case study of expanding notions of literacy

Thank you for addressing the conditions placed on the above application to the Murdoch University Human Research Ethics Sub-Committee. On behalf of the Committee, I am pleased to advise the application now has:

### OUTRIGHT APPROVAL

Approval is granted on the understanding that research will be conducted according to the standards of the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (2007), the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research* (2007) and Murdoch University policies at all times. You must also abide by the Human Research Ethics Committee's standard conditions of approval (see attached). All reporting forms are available on the Research Ethics web-site.

I wish you every success for your research.

Please quote your ethics project number in all correspondence.

Kind Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "E. von Dietze".

Dr. Erich von Dietze  
Manager of Research Ethics

cc: Dr Susan Hesterman  
Veronica Gardiner

HREC Outright Approval Letter 16012012

CRICOS Provider Code: 001253  
ABN 61 616 369 313





Government of Western Australia  
Department of Education

Your ref :  
Our ref : D12/0062628  
Enquiries :

Ms Veronica Gardiner  
41 Bridgeman Way  
Baldvis WA 6171

Dear Ms Gardiner

Thank you for your completed application received 23 January 2012 to conduct research on Department of Education sites.

The focus and outcomes of your research project, *Exploring 'multiliteracies book clubs' for primary teacher professional learning: a case study of expanding notions of literacy*, are of interest to the Department. I give permission for you to approach site managers to invite their participation in the project as outlined in your application. It is a condition of approval, however, that upon conclusion the results of this study are forwarded to the Department at the email address below.

Consistent with Department policy, participation in your research project will be the decision of the schools invited to participate and individual staff members. A copy of this letter must be provided to site managers when requesting their participation in the research. Researchers are required to sign a confidential declaration upon arrival at the Department of Education site.

Responsibility for quality control of ethics and methodology of the proposed research resides with the institution supervising the research. The Department notes a copy of a letter confirming that you have received ethical approval of your research protocol from Murdoch University Ethics Committee is outstanding. Approval is subject to the Department receiving a copy of the letter of ethical approval for your research when it is issued.

Any proposed changes to the research project will need to be submitted for Department approval prior to implementation.

Please contact Ms Allison McLaren, A/Evaluation Officer, on (08) 9264 5512 or [researchandpolicy@det.wa.edu.au](mailto:researchandpolicy@det.wa.edu.au) if you have further enquiries.

Very best wishes for the successful completion of your project.

Yours sincerely

ALAN DODSON  
DIRECTOR  
EVALUATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

8 February 2012



**Research Ethics Office**  
Division of Research and Development

Monday, 23 July 2012

Dr Wendy Cumming-Potvin  
School of Education  
Murdoch University

Chancellery Building  
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[www.research.murdoch.edu.au/ethics](http://www.research.murdoch.edu.au/ethics)

Dear Wendy,

**Project No.** 2012/004  
**Project Title** Exploring 'multiliteracies book clubs' for primary teacher professional learning: A case study of expanding notions of literacy

**AMENDMENT:** Inclusion of additional 'multiliteracies book club' session

Your application for an amendment to the above project, received on 23 July 2012 was reviewed by the Murdoch University Research Ethics Office and was;

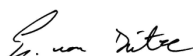
**APPROVED**

**Approval is granted on the understanding that research will be conducted according to the standards of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007), the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (2007) and Murdoch University policies at all times. You must also abide by the Human Research Ethics Committee's standard conditions of approval (see attached). All reporting forms are available on the Research Ethics web-site.**

**I wish you every success for your research.**

Please quote your ethics permit number in all correspondence.

Kind Regards,



Dr. Erich von Dietze  
Manager of Research Ethics

cc: Dr Susan Hesterman and Veronica Gardiner

HREC Outright Approval Letter 16012012

CRICOS Provider Code: 00125J  
ABN 61 616 369 313

Thursday, 28 February 2013

Dr Wendy Cumming-Potvin  
School of Education  
Murdoch University

Dear Wendy,

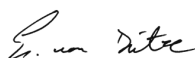
<b>Project No.</b>	2012/004
<b>Project Title</b>	Exploring 'multiliteracies book clubs' for primary teacher professional learning: A case study of expanding notions of literacy

On behalf of the Murdoch University Human Research Ethics Committee, I certify that this project is renewed until **28 February 2014**, subject to any conditions listed below. This approval is effective **ONLY** with respect to the project as described in the original application and any subsequent amendments that have received approval.

As a condition of the approval of your human research ethics application you are required to report immediately anything, which might affect ethical acceptance of your project's protocols, including:

- Adverse effects on subjects
- Proposed changes in the protocols
- Unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.

Kind Regards,



Dr. Erich von Dietze  
Manager of Research Ethics

cc: Dr Susan Hesterman  
Veronica Gardiner

HREC Renewal Receipt 140113

CRICOS Provider Code: 00125J  
ABN 61 616 369 313



**Division of Research & Development**  
Research Ethics and Integrity Office

Thursday, 01 May 2014

Dr Wendy Cumming-Potvin  
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Murdoch University

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Dear Wendy,

<b>Project No.</b>	2012/004
<b>Project Title</b>	Exploring 'multiliteracies book clubs' for primary teacher professional learning: A case study of expanding notions of literacy

On behalf of the Murdoch University Human Research Ethics Committee, I certify that this project is renewed until **28 February 2015**, subject to any conditions listed below. This approval is effective ONLY with respect to the project as described in the original application and any subsequent amendments that have received approval.

As a condition of the approval of your human research ethics application you are required to report immediately anything, which might affect ethical acceptance of your project's protocols, including:

- Adverse effects on subjects
- Proposed changes in the protocols
- Unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.

Kind Regards,

Dr. Erich von Dietze  
Manager  
Research Ethics and Integrity

cc: Dr Susan Hesterman; Veronica Gardiner

## **Appendix C: Principal/teacher information sheets and consent forms**

### **Principal/Site Manager Information Letter: Teacher Recruitment for Research**

Dear

STUDY: Exploring ‘multiliteracies book clubs’ for primary teacher professional learning: A Case study of expanding notions of literacy.

My name is Veronica Gardiner. I am conducting a research project that aims to explore innovative professional literacy learning. The project is being conducted as part of a Masters of Education by Research, at Murdoch University.

I would like to invite *[insert Department site]* to take part in recruitment for the project. The project is tailored so that a small group of public school teachers can conveniently participate in a local book club. The study itself will not take place in Department of Education schools or sites. However, *[Insert Department site]* is one of several schools in Western Australia being approached for recruitment of participants.

#### **What does participation in the research project involve?**

I seek to recruit a total of 8 public primary school teachers, from local public primary schools.

Teachers will be invited to participate in:

- A total of 4, monthly ‘book club’ meetings, where a group of teachers will explore a wide variety of contemporary forms of text, literacy practice and resources. This will involve collaborative work and discussion. Sometimes collaborative and creative experiences will take place in small groups.
- A “Multiliteracies book club” website, which will include a secure online discussion board to share group learning and resources.
- 2 ‘focus group’ sessions as part of the first and last book club meetings, where teachers will be asked about their experiences with and understandings of literacy, and professional learning. This will include commenting on professional learning through the book club.

All discussions will be audio taped and analysed for emerging themes and patterns. Planning documents and learning objects may be photographed by the researcher. Student products will not be used. There will be no photographs of participants or sharing of photographs from classrooms. Teachers will be asked to keep the identities of other participants confidential. They will also be asked not to refer by name to people or children who are not participants in this study.

#### **Where and when?**

It is anticipated that book club meetings will each take approximately 1 to 1 1/2 hours, in a local community centre, at a regular time suitable to participants. This will be negotiated with the group, and will likely be in the late afternoon or early evening on a weeknight. The four meetings are planned

for the period between May and September. Discussion board participation will be flexible and depend on the interest of participants. The discussion board may remain open for 3 or 4 weeks after the end of face-to-face meetings.

The school's involvement will be limited to recruitment

**To what extent is participation voluntary, and what are the implications of withdrawing that participation?**

Participation in this research project is entirely voluntary. If any teacher volunteer decides to participate and then later changes their mind, they are able to withdraw from participation at any time. Given that the data are based on group discussions, the contributions of any single person will not be deleted from group recordings if a participant withdraws. However, all information will be treated as confidential during and after the study and no names or other identifying details will be used in any publication arising from the research.

There will be no consequences relating to any decision by an individual or recruitment site regarding participation, other than those already described in this letter. Decisions made will not affect the relationship with Murdoch University.

**What will happen to the information collected, and is privacy and confidentiality assured?**

Information that identifies teacher participants will be removed from the data collected. The data will be stored securely in locked cupboards at the residence of the researcher and in the office of the research supervisor, and can only be accessed by them. The data will be securely and accessibly stored at Murdoch University for at least 5 years, after which it will be destroyed. At this time, digitally recorded data will be deleted and paper recordings of data will be shredded in a secure environment at the university.

The identity of participants and their place of employment will not be disclosed at any time, except where the research team is legally required to disclose that information. Participant privacy, and the confidentiality of information disclosed by participants, is assured at all other times. The data will be used only for this project, and will not be used in any future research without first obtaining explicit written consent from participants.

Consistent with Department of Education policy, a summary of the research findings will be made available to the Department. You can expect this to be available by approximately June 2013.

**Is this research approved?**

The research has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Murdoch University [2012/004] and has met the policy requirements of the Department of Education.

**Who do I contact if I wish to discuss the project further?**

If you would like to discuss any aspect of recruitment for this study please contact Veronica (Ronnie) Gardiner on mobile 0400 452 257 or my supervisor, Dr Wendy Cumming-Potvin, on Ph.9360 2192 ([w.cumming-potvin@murdoch.edu.au](mailto:w.cumming-potvin@murdoch.edu.au)). If you wish to speak with an independent person about recruitment for the project, please contact Murdoch University's Ethics Manager (Dr E. von Dietze).

**How do I indicate my willingness for this school to be a recruitment site?**

If you have had all questions about recruitment for the project answered to your satisfaction, and are willing to provide recruitment for this study, please complete the **Principal Consent Form**. This information letter is for you to keep.

Mrs Veronica Gardiner  
Master of Education by Research Candidate  
Murdoch University, South Street Campus, Murdoch Western Australia  
Mobile 0400 452 257

## **Teacher Information Letter**

Exploring 'multiliteracies book clubs' for  
primary teacher professional learning:  
A case study of expanding notions of literacy.

Dear

We invite you to participate in a research study looking at professional development and literacy. This study represents part of my Master of Education by Research Degree, supervised by Dr. Wendy Cumming-Potvin at Murdoch University

### **Nature and purpose of the study**

Public primary schools across Western Australia are preparing to implement the new Australian Curriculum for English. This document includes some new terminology and concepts about literacy. Many teachers are wondering what these changes mean, and how to access new ways of thinking about literate practice.

The aim of this study is to investigate how a group of public primary school teachers can develop these understandings about literacy by participating in a 'book club'. This form of professional learning would take place in an informal social way away from schools.

If you consent to take part in this research study, it is important that you understand the purpose of the study. Please make sure that you ask any questions you may have, and that all your questions have been answered to your satisfaction before you agree to participate.

### **What the study will involve**

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be invited to participate by:

- Attending 4 monthly 'book club' meetings, where a group of teachers will explore a wide variety of contemporary forms of text, literacy practice and resources. This will involve you in collaborative work and discussion with about 7 other teachers plus the researcher. Sometimes collaborative and creative experiences will take place in small groups.
- Accessing at your leisure a "Multiliteracies book club" website and using a secure online discussion board to share group learning and resources.
- Participating in 2 'focus group' sessions as part of the first and last book club meetings, where you will be asked about your experiences with and understandings of literacy, and your experiences with professional learning. This will include commenting on professional learning through the book club.
- Completing a general background questionnaire as part of the first book club meeting.

## **Where and when?**

It is anticipated that the book club meetings will each take approximately 1 to 1 1/2 hours, in a local community centre, at a regular time suitable for participants. This will be negotiated with the group, and will likely be on in the late afternoon or early evening on a weeknight. The four meetings are planned for the period between May and September. Discussion board participation will be flexible and depend on your interest. The discussion board may remain open for 3 or 4 weeks after the end of face-to-face meetings.

## **What information will be collected?**

All collaborative discussions and individual sharing of perspectives will be audio taped at all times. Printouts of discussion board postings will also be kept for the study. At times, learning objects such as planning frameworks, may be photographed by the researcher, although student work samples and products will not be used. You will be asked to complete a general background questionnaire, asking about topics such as your years of teaching experience and any special education interests you may have. You will be asked to keep the identities of other participants confidential. You will also be asked not to refer by name to people or children who are not participants in this study.

## **Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal from the Study**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. This decision must be made entirely by you, and must not be part of workplace expectations or arrangements. The study does not aim to contribute to formal professional learning requirements at your workplace and is not subject to performance management routines. You may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without discrimination or prejudice. Given the discussion nature of the data, individual contributions will not be deleted from the group recordings. However, all information will be treated as confidential during and after the study, and no names or other details that might identify you will be used in any publication arising from the research.

## **Privacy**

Your privacy is very important. You will not be asked for personal or sensitive information. Additionally, whether you elect to participate or not will be kept entirely confidential. Although we initially approached your school to recruit interested teachers, school staff and administration will not know whether you have elected to participate in this study, even after it is finished.

## **Benefits of the Study**

While it is possible that there may be no direct benefit to you from participation in this study, the aim of the study is to explore how book clubs help teachers develop their literacy knowledge and understandings. This is very relevant at the current time, when all Western Australian public school teachers are encountering new concepts and language in the Australian Curriculum for English. This study offers teachers a new and collaborative way of building this knowledge.

While there is no guarantee that you will personally benefit, the knowledge gained from your participation may help others in the future. New ways of considering professional learning are an important contribution to the



educational field. Professional literacy learning is a core concern of every educator and every school, and ultimately concerns the potential learning of students. At a deeper level, the book club explores theoretical issues to do with contemporary literacy, teacher knowledge, and change through professional learning. Development of the book club model may be of wider interest to those who wish to support relevant and contemporary literacy practice.

### **Possible Risks**

There are no specific risks anticipated with participation in this study.

If you have any questions about this project please feel free to contact either myself, Veronica (Ronnie) Gardiner on mobile 0400 452 257 or my supervisor, Dr Wendy Cumming-Potvin, on Ph. 9360 2192 ([w.cumming-potvin@murdoch.edu.au](mailto:w.cumming-potvin@murdoch.edu.au)). My supervisor and I are happy to discuss with you any concerns you may have about this study.

Once we have analyzed the information from this study, you will be emailed a 2-page summary of our findings. Prior to analysis you will also be given the opportunity to verify and comment on audio transcriptions from the book clubs.

If you are willing to consent to participation in this study, please complete the **Consent Form**.

Thank you for your assistance with this research project.

Sincerely,

Veronica Gardiner

<p>This study has been approved by the Murdoch University Human Research Ethics Committee (<b>Approval 2012/004</b>). If you have any reservation or complaint about the ethical conduct of this research, and wish to talk with an independent person, you may contact Murdoch University' Research Ethics Office (Tel. 08 9360 6677 (for overseas studies, +61 8 9360 6677) or e-mail <a href="mailto:ethics@murdoch.edu.au">ethics@murdoch.edu.au</a>). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.</p>
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**Recruitment Consent Form**  
**Multiliteracies Book Clubs Study**

- I have read the Information Letter for Principals and understand the aims, procedures, and risks of this project, as described within it.
- For any questions I may have had, I have taken up the invitation to ask those questions, and I am satisfied with the answers I received.
- I am willing for Bungaree Primary School to become a recruitment site for the research project, as described.
- I understand that recruitment and teacher participation in the project is entirely voluntary.
- Teachers can withdraw from participation at any time up until completion of the study. Given that the data are based on group discussions, the contributions of any single person will not be deleted from group recordings if a participant withdraws. However, all information will be treated as confidential during and after the study and no names or other identifying details will be used in any publication arising from the research.
- I understand that this research will be published in a Masters Thesis, and that the participants or the school will not be identified in any way.
- I understand that the Department of Education, Royal Street East Perth will be provided with a copy of the findings from this research upon its completion. Participants will independently receive a 2-page summary of findings, in an easy to read format.

Name of Site Manager (printed):

\_\_\_\_\_

Name of Recruitment Site:

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature:

\_\_\_\_\_

Date:    /    /

**Teacher Participant Consent Form**  
**MULTILITERACIES BOOK CLUB**

**Participant**

I have read the teacher participant information sheet, which explains the nature of the research and the possible risks and benefits. The information has been explained to me and all my questions have been satisfactorily answered. I have been given a copy of the information sheet to keep.

I am happy to attend 4 book club meetings and participate in focus group sessions as part of the first and last meeting. I am happy for all discussions to be audio recorded, and for discussion board postings to be used as part of this research. I am happy to complete a general background questionnaire, about such details as academic qualifications and educational interests. I also agree to photographic recording of learning objects such as planning documents. I understand that I do not have to answer particular questions if I do not want to and that I can withdraw from participation at any time without consequences to myself.

I agree that research data gathered from the results of the study may be published provided my name or any identifying data is not used. I have also been informed that I may not receive any direct benefits from participating in this study.

I understand that all information provided by me is treated as confidential. It will not be released by the researcher to a third party unless required to do so by law. I also agree to not identify school colleagues and students by their names.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant/Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name

I wish to receive feedback about the study YES/ NO

If yes, please provide your email address here \_\_\_\_\_

**Investigator**

I have fully explained to \_\_\_\_\_ the nature and purpose of the research, the procedures to be employed, and the possible risks involved. I have provided the participant with a copy of the Information Sheet.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator/Date    Signature of Chief Investigator/Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name

**Teacher Participant Consent Form**  
**MULTILITERACIES BOOK CLUB**

**Participant**

I have read the teacher participant information sheet, which explains the nature of the research and the possible risks and benefits. The information has been explained to me and all my questions have been satisfactorily answered. I have been given a copy of the information sheet to keep.

I am happy to attend 5 book club meetings and participate in focus group sessions as part of the first and last meeting. I am happy for all discussions to be audio recorded, and for discussion board postings to be used as part of this research. I am happy to complete a general background questionnaire, about such details as academic qualifications and educational interests. I also agree to photographic recording of learning objects such as planning documents. I understand that I do not have to answer particular questions if I do not want to and that I can withdraw from participation at any time without consequences to myself.

I agree that research data gathered from the results of the study may be published provided my name or any identifying data is not used. I have also been informed that I may not receive any direct benefits from participating in this study.

I understand that all information provided by me is treated as confidential. It will not be released by the researcher to a third party unless required to do so by law. I also agree to not identify school colleagues and students by their names.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant/Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name

I wish to receive feedback about the study YES/ NO

If yes, please provide your email address here \_\_\_\_\_

**Investigator**

I have fully explained to \_\_\_\_\_ the nature and purpose of the research, the procedures to be employed, and the possible risks involved. I have provided the participant with a copy of the Information Sheet.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator/Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Chief Investigator/Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name

## Appendix D: Background questionnaire

Teacher Participant Code:

**Instructions-** *Please circle or reply to each of the following. Answer questions to the best of your ability. You may omit some questions if you wish.*

1. Which grade level are you teaching now? If teaching more than one, circle or list them as appropriate.

- K-2
- 3-4
- 5-7
- Other?

2. How many years of classroom teaching experience do you have?

- Over 10 years
- Over 5 years
- Over 2 years
- Other

3. Where were you born?

Country

State

4. Which language(s) do you use on a regular basis?

5. What main teaching roles or duties have you performed during this time?

6. What are your main academic qualifications as a teacher?

7. Do you have any other training or qualifications that you believe are relevant to your teaching practice?  
*(If yes, please describe them)*

8. Where did you complete the majority of your teacher education? *(Please give the name of the university or other institution, country and state)*

9. Where have you mainly practiced as a classroom teacher? (e.g. Which country, state, or region?).

10. Do you have any particular educational interests?  
(If yes, please describe them)

11. What is your age range?

- 56 - over
- 46 - 55
- 36 - 45
- 27 - 35
- 18 - 26

Thank-you for completing this brief questionnaire.

## Appendix E: Focus group questions

### Initial Focus Group

- 1a) *If you could describe your past professional learning experiences using your own words to someone who hasn't participated in them, how would you describe what you have experienced?*
- 2a) *How do you think your professional learning experiences have impacted on your literacy teaching and learning?*
- 3a) *How do you think these different types of professional experiences have affected your literacy learning?*
- 4a) *How would you describe what 'literacy' and literacy teaching are?*
- 5a) *How would you describe the characteristics of a literate person?*
- 6a) *How do you think literacy and primary literacy teaching are being affected by current curriculum changes?*
- 7a) *How do you feel about commencing the book club? (Participants may be given the opportunity to engage in a visual arts stimulus activity, to help them respond to this question).*

### Final Focus Group

- 1b) *If you could describe the book club using your own words to someone who hasn't participated, how would you describe what we have been doing? How does it compare to the kinds of professional learning opportunities have you been involved with in the past?*
- 2b) *How do you think participating in the book club may have impacted on your professional learning about literacy?*
- 3b) *How do you think the 'book club' has affected your literacy learning?*
- 4b) *How would you describe literacy and literacy teaching now that you have experienced this book club?*
- 5b) *Today, how would you describe the characteristics of a literate person?*
- 6b) *How do you think your ideas about literacy and literacy learning have developed over the course of the book club?*
- 7b) *How do you feel about coming to the end of our book club? (Participants may be given the opportunity to engage in a visual arts stimulus activity, to help them respond to this question).*



## Appendix F: Description of texts in the postmodern picture book collection

Text	Description
Baker, J. (2004). <i>Window</i> . Newtown, NSW: Walker Books	A window frame is used as an anchor for telling the story of a little girl growing up in her developing suburban community.
Browne, A. (1998). <i>Voices in the Park</i> . London: Corgi	Four contrasting mini-narratives are presented about one day in a park.
Gravatt, E. (2008). <i>Emily Gravatt's Big Book of Fears</i> . London: MacMillan	Collaged layouts and overlapping genres lend depth and humor to themes.
Hutchins, P. (2010). <i>Rosie's Walk</i> . (2010). Melbourne: Puffin	The print text and the images of the narrative parody each other.
Macaulay, D. (1990). <i>Black and White</i> . Boston: Houghton & Mifflin	Four overlapping narratives are presented in images and print.
Scieszka, J. & Smith, L. (1989). <i>The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs</i> . New York: Viking Press	Text and image parody a popular fairy tale.
Scieszka, J. & Smith, L. (1992). <i>The Stinky Cheese man and other Fairly Stupid Tales</i> . New York: Viking	Non-linear text is used to innovate well know fairy tales.
Snow, A. (2009). <i>How Cats Really Work</i> . Melbourne Australia: HarperCollins Children's Books	Parodies hierarchies between humans, cats and dogs. Overlapping genres and novel layouts make for humorous presentation of the theme.
Tan, S. (2001). <i>The Red Tree</i> . Marina Dalrea	Parallels are drawn between a lonely girl and the journey of a leaf through affective imagery.
Tan, S. (2006). <i>The Arrival</i> . Melbourne: Lothian	A graphic novel without words, on the theme of being a migrant in a strange place.
Tan, S. (2008). <i>Tales from Outer Suburbia</i> . Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin	A collection of short stories and images that make familiar aspects of suburban life seem strange.

## Appendix G: Excerpt of Visual Mode Resource Sheet

### RESOURCE SHEET Visual Mode

The following table gives teachers a starting point for making sense of the visual elements of multimodal texts. Children benefit from lots of planned and incidental opportunities to work with these ideas across a wide range of print and digital formats. Gradually, teachers and students build up a bank of shared metalanguage and experiences, which form a base for continuing learning.

Element	Detail	Possible focus questions
Action		<p><b>These first examples integrate levels of questioning and types of connections:</b></p> <p><b>Literal</b> What are the characters or objects doing?</p> <p><b>Inferential</b> What is the main idea? Is the action imaginary or pretend? (Text to text connections)</p> <p><b>Comparative-Apply</b> Do the actions remind you of things you do? (Text to self connections)</p> <p><b>Evaluative</b> How are these actions important? What did you learn about the text from what you saw? Do you have an opinion about the actions or how they were presented? (Text to world connections)</p>
Camera angle	<p>For instance – a front angle suggests viewer involvement with the person or objects in the image. An oblique or side on angle suggests detachment from the characters in the image.</p> <p>Top down or vertical angles suggest the viewer is looking down on the person or object.</p> <p>Low angle means the viewer is looking up and the character or object is given power in the image.</p> <p>Eye level angle may mean equality and connection with the viewer.</p>	<p>What is the camera angle?</p> <p>What effect does this have on the message of the image, and the relationship between the text and the viewer?</p>
Character presentation and clothing	<p>What ideas and feelings are associated with the characters?</p>	<p>How are the characters portrayed and what ideas and emotions do we associate with them? Think about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• body language</li> <li>• gender</li> <li>• stereotypes</li> </ul>

## Appendix H: Annotated transcript examples

### Image of transcript segment from the second meeting

Transcript segment	Observation
<p>250. Vicki: Can anyone tell me what teratophobia is?</p> <p>251. Fiona: Teratophobia? Is it fear of terats?</p> <p>252. Vicki: close (laughing). Fear of monsters.</p> <p>253. Brooke: Monsters? Is that right?</p> <p>254. Vicki: Clingaphobia?</p> <p>255. Fiona: [inaudible segment]</p> <p>256. Vicki: Fear of, going to bed.</p>	<p>Looking at Mouse's Big Book of Fears</p>

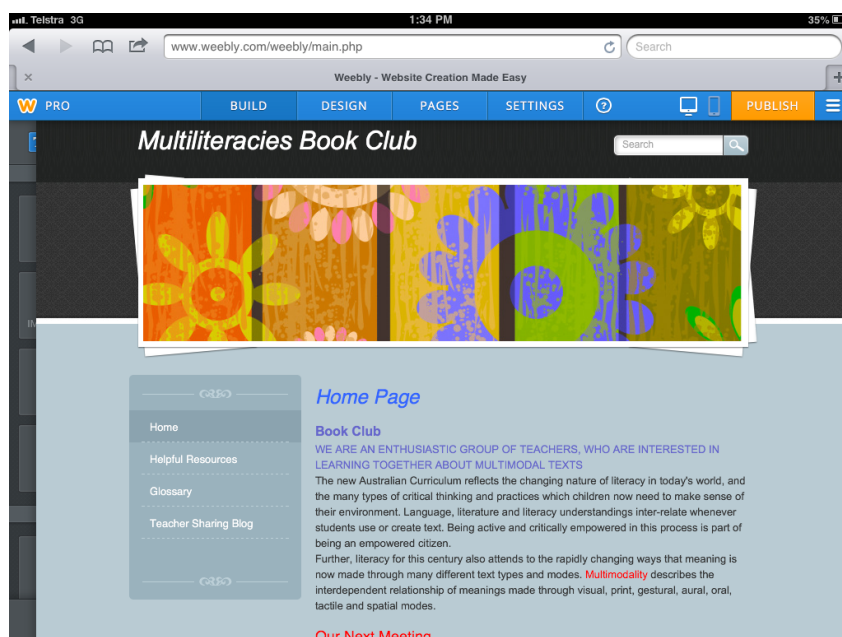
Transcript segment	Observations
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### Image of transcript segment from the fifth meeting

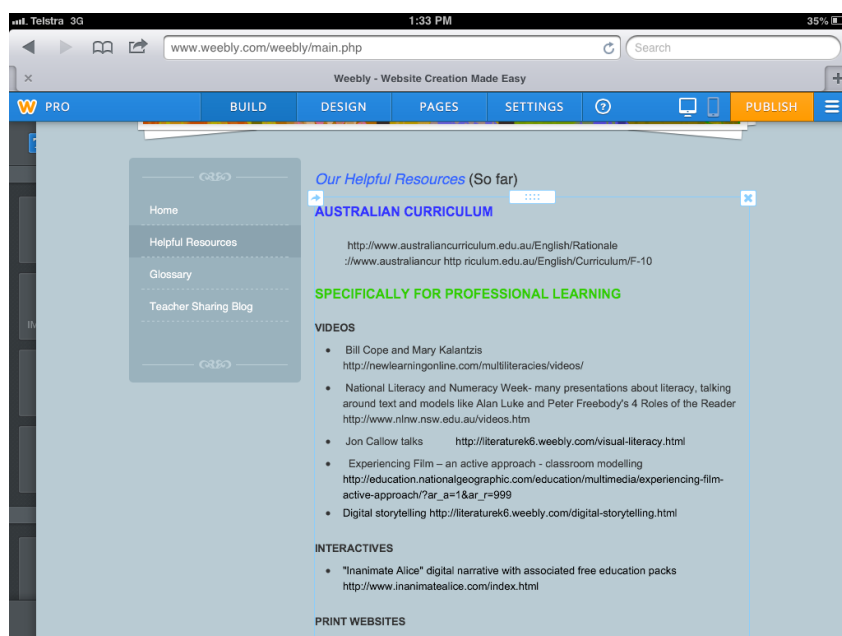
<p>103. Ronnie: English would be a big job though wouldn't it?</p> <p>104. Brooke: Yeah. I'd like to-</p> <p>105. Vicki: We've got someone who's in charge of the SAER stuff, so that's a separate, you know, she can deal with the English sort of things. And someone that developed our <i>reading</i> program.</p> <p>106. Ronnie: Right.</p> <p>107. Vicki: With <i>others</i>, but it was really her baby, so, you know, she sort of does <i>that</i>. So really</p> <p>108. Brooke: Oh like reading detective and that.</p> <p>109. Vicki: Yeah. (crockery noises) So really I don't (microwave noises), you know, I can just fluff around the edges.</p>	<p>We are still in the kitchen with the food and coffees.</p> <p>Moving to the little ring of fold up chairs with our food and coffees.</p>
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## Appendix I: Screen captured images of the multiliteracies book club website

The homepage



Part of the 'Helpful Resources' page



## Appendix J: Transcription protocol and transcript excerpt

Adapted from the work of Gee (2011), and McLellan, MacQueen, and Neidig (2003)

### Structure:

- Each transcript header is labelled with start and finish time, venue, and people present (using pseudonyms)
- Numbered utterances are justified left, with a new line for each numbered utterance, labelled with the speakers' pseudonym
- Time elapse is recorded at the bottom of each transcript page

### Content:

- Nonverbal sounds – typed in parentheses, for example (group laughter) or (scraping noise)
- Mispronunciations, hesitations and grammar are uncorrected – speech is transcribed verbatim
- Inaudible information – identified by the phrase 'inaudible segment' in parentheses
- Overlapping speech – identified with the phrase 'inaudible cross talk', or brackets at the beginning of contiguous utterances
- Linked turn taking – identified using the symbol =
- Intonation – rising intonation noted with question marks at the end of utterances. Speech emphasis noted in italics and parentheses, for example (speech emphasis)
- Pauses – short pauses are described using dots for example ... Substantial pauses denoted by parentheses, for example (long pause)
- Sensitive information, such as names of students, schools or school personnel deleted, for example replaced with XXXXX

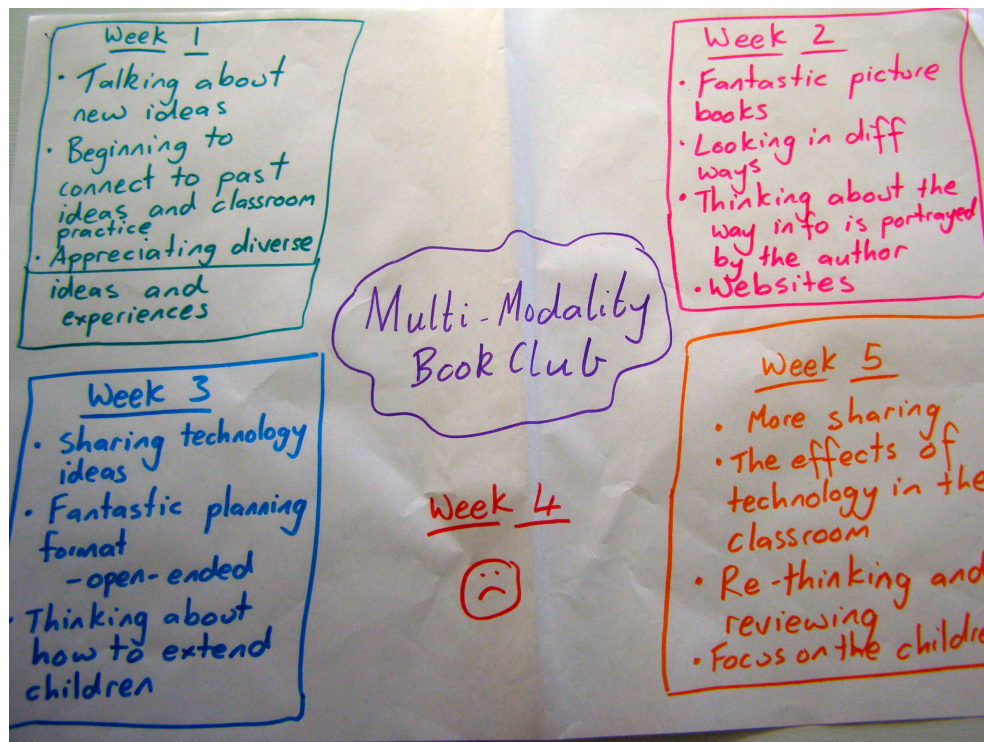
**An image of a transcript segment is provided below to demonstrate the application of conventions.**

141. Jo: This is my first coffee all day. (laughing)  
142. Ronnie: Teachers certainly deserve . . . and that's the thing isn't it? People don't know=  
143. Jo: =I haven't had a chance to have a coffee=  
144. Ronnie: =that teachers might not, you to put off going to the toilet for 4 hours {and they might not have any coffee  
145. Tash: {Oh, that's what it's like.  
146. Jo: We had um book um parade today. So we were all dressed up at school today (ha ha ha)  
147. Tash: I was the evil witch last Wednesday.  
148. Jo: he he he  
149. Tash: I mean the evil queen sorry not the evil witch. Evil queen from 'Snow White'. I thought I did that quite well.  
150. Tash: I mean I was the evil queen.



## Appendix K: Complete images of the storymap posters

### Anna's poster



### Vicki's poster



## Brooke's poster





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